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Successful, White, Female Teachers of Mexican American Students

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Successful, White, Female Teachers of Mexican American Students

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of

Alejandra Yvette Garza

and

Carlos Treviño

“Que toda la vida es sueño, y los sueños, sueños son.”
(Calderón de la Barca)

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Successful, White, Female Teachers of Mexican American Students

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This research was a qualitative study of 4 White, female elementary school teachers working in an urban school district populated by a majority of Mexican American students. This study sought to identify the attributes that in spite of cultural differences allow White, middle-class, female teachers to be effective in providing a successful school experience to Mexican American children. This study examined the perceptions, beliefs, and life experiences of these 4 White female teachers and the practices they bring to their classroom.

The data were collected through interviews, observations, and documents. The themes that emerged from the data included (a) teachers' perceptions of culture, (b) teachers' perceptions of parents and their roles, (c) expectations and success, and (d) effects of standardized testing. These data were examined using a conceptual model for analysis comprised of two perspectives: (a) culturally relevant teaching and (b) subtractive schooling (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999).

This study offers implications for policy, practice and research. An implication for research might be that policymakers collectively and collaboratively identify the knowledge and skills necessary for educators to lead from a strong social justice perspective. The implication for practice is to provide a venue for teachers to explore concepts of culture, poverty, and language and what it means in relation to how their philosophies impact the children in their classroom. Methods for examining teachers' perceptions about students and beliefs about teaching need to be available. In addition, teachers must be prepared and supported to challenge the assimilationist ideologies of the school culture. Research in the area of successful teachers of minority students needs to persist. The search to reveal successful teacher attributes that would assist in developing an educational process and prepare teachers to deal effectively with a diverse student population must continue.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Introduction

The educational statistics for low socioeconomic status (SES), Mexican American students reveal disproportionate academic underachievement in comparison with their Anglo counterparts (Cummins, 1989, 1997; Valencia, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999). The literature has focused consistently on the alleged deficiencies of the Mexican American child, thus fostering attitudes of racial prejudice among educators. Consequently, educators have assumed that the failure of Mexican American students can be naturally attributed to their racial or cultural inferiority, their language, low SES, parents' low education, and their perceived lack of interest (Carter & Segura, 1979).

This focus on deficit thinking has had a deleterious effect on "culturally disadvantaged" children. However, many students have done well in school because they have had teachers who have helped them succeed. Although the research on the poor achievement of minority students is abundant, there is significantly less, if any, research about successful teachers of minority students. Virtually no studies have been conducted to examine how "successful" White teachers have acquired the critical understanding and commitment necessary for the successful education of minority

students. Few studies have brought to the forefront the issue of teachers' perceptions of their students of color and how their different lived experiences, attitudes, and beliefs play out in the success or the failure of their students.

Prevailing Explanations for the Underachievement of Students of Color

The literature on culturally relevant teaching has made an important contribution to the field of education in terms of exploring the beliefs and practices of teachers who successfully connected their students from marginalized groups with academic success (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Theories of and research about culturally relevant teaching have widened our knowledge of what comprises pedagogical success and how it may be achieved. However, there is a lack of understanding why some White teachers become interested in encouraging and nurturing relationships with their minority students, particularly those children who have been negatively labeled by the school system. In the absence of research documenting the development of culturally relevant teachers and their perceptions and beliefs, it could be assumed that successful teaching is primarily a matter of cultural similarity. This assumption could be misguided, however, because it denies the reality of class, gender, and ethnic diversity within any community. It also does not provide a direction for the reality of a majority White female teaching force educating an increasingly non-White public school population.

Divergent Demographics

While the students in U.S. urban schools are primarily poor and of color, the majority of their teachers are White, monolingual, middle-class women (Zeichner, 1993). As reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (1996), enrollment in schools, colleges, and departments of education is 493,606. Of these students, 86.5% (426,748) are White, 6.8% (33,436) are African American, and 2.7% (13,533) are Latino. These figures clearly illustrate that a growing percentage of predominantly White higher education faculty are preparing a growing percentage of predominantly White student teachers to educate a growing population of public school students who are very different from them racially, ethnically, linguistically, and economically. The teaching force is becoming increasingly White, approximately 88%, while the student population will soon be over 50% non-White.

In light of this increasing majority of White female teachers, limited research has examined the development and significance of White female teachers' beliefs and perceptions of their students of color. Several studies have focused specifically on "successful" teachers (Beauboeuf, 1997; Chamberlain, 1999; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994), but none have looked specifically at successful White teachers of Mexican-American students. The educational statistics for Mexican-American students reveal disproportionate academic underachievement in comparison with their

Anglo counterparts. However, although vast research has examined effective teaching practices, little research has examined specifically White female teachers' perspectives on effective teaching strategies and practices for Mexican-American students. This validates the need for more research in this area.

This study of White, middle-class, female teachers examined not only "good" teaching but also the beliefs and perceptions of these teachers about their Mexican-American students. This study looked at the attributes and other emergent variables that, in spite of cultural and linguistic differences, have allowed White, middle-class, female teachers to be effective in providing successful school experiences to low-SES, Mexican American students. With this in mind, this inquiry was designed to bring forth the beliefs and experiences of White teachers who have been identified as successful teachers of Mexican American children and how these beliefs and experiences helped design and drive their pedagogy.

Another important component of this study is an attempt to understand not only the pedagogy, but also how White, middle-class, female teachers have come to see their role in social justice as it relates to equity and excellence for all children. This study attempted to provide another framework for viewing effective teaching of low-SES, minority students. This research critically explored how teachers' perceptions and beliefs impact the success or failure of low-SES, Mexican American children.

Results provide educators with important information about the role of the teacher in the education of low-SES, minority students.

Statement of the Problem

Children of color continue to have the highest dropout rate, misplacement and overrepresentation in special education, overage for grade level, and underrepresentation in gifted and talented and advanced placement programs (Cummins, 1989, 1997; Valencia, 1991). Public schools and institutions of higher education have failed to develop a critical, pedagogical educational environment that is effective for and relevant to the needs of children of color. Schools have failed children of color miserably (Freire, 1985; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Valencia, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999).

There is a continued and increasing demographic and cultural mismatch between students and teachers in both public schools and institutions of higher learning. Numerous studies have demonstrated that deficit thinking paradigms are highly pervasive in both these institutions and consequently perpetuate the value system as the norm. Statistics also show increasing ethnic, cultural, and language mismatches between students and teachers in public schools, colleges, and universities (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996; National Education Association, 2002). The dramatic increase in poor, non-White, and immigrant students in U.S.

public schools serves as a warning of an urgent need to understand and challenge the beliefs of prospective teachers in teacher education programs. Within the next two decades, classrooms in public schools in most large cities will net a majority of African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. In 1945, the U.S. population was 87% White, 10% Black, 2.5% Hispanic, and 0.5 Asian American. By the year 2050, Whites will make up 52.8%; Hispanics, 24.5%; Blacks, 13.6%; and Asian Americans, 8.2% (NCES, 1996). The continued change in demographics leading to a majority of non-White students requires teacher preparation programs to be designed to prepare aspiring White teachers to teach and interact appropriately with non-White students. The challenge is not only how to adequately prepare an overwhelmingly White, female, middle-class teaching population to work with diverse student groups, but also to discover how they have come to know and recognize what guides their pedagogy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate an area that has been overlooked in educational research and is missing in educational discourse: the attitudes, beliefs, and life experiences of White, female teachers of Mexican American children. The main purpose of this study was to reveal successful teacher attributes that would assist in developing an educational process to prepare teachers to deal effectively with

a diverse population and bring forth dialogue of highly effective, successful, White, female teachers. An additional intent of this study was to provide discourse to reflect and examine practices that will lead to the suspension of the deficit thinking embedded in educational practices.

Research Questions

Overarching Question

One overarching research question guided this study. What are the specific attributes that, in spite of cultural differences, allow White, middle-class, female teachers to be effective in providing successful school experiences to low-SES, Mexican American children? Specifically, this research question involves two aspects of attributes: (a) attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions and (b) life experiences.

Underlying Questions

1. What are the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of teachers about themselves and their Mexican American students?
2. What are the life experiences of these teachers that have helped them be successful in teaching Mexican American students?

Methodology

This qualitative study used the naturalistic inquiry paradigm to guide the research design (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). The researcher relied on in-depth, open-ended interviews and direct observation to collect data (Patton, 1990). The investigator observed characteristics of participants and events in their natural setting. The concepts were allowed to emerge during the research process. Theoretical frameworks were used to analyze and organize themes and categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The principal sources of data were the teachers; primary units of analysis were drawn from the selected teachers. To support the primary data sources of the participants, other sources included superintendents, principals, peers, and other significant individuals.

This study utilized a grounded theory approach, a specific type of qualitative research. The primary objective of using grounded theory methodology was to develop a grounded theoretical model that would explain the phenomenon of interest (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1998), who originated grounded theory, defined it as theory derived from data that are systematically gathered and analyzed throughout the research process. The researcher begins with an area of study, analyzes the data, and allows the theory to emerge from the data.

This was an exploratory study using qualitative naturalistic inquiry methods (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) to develop an understanding of human behavior. I explored a

particular phenomenon of individuals or groups in terms of their experiences and their interpretation or way of making sense of their surroundings (Patton, 1990). My interest was to examine the specific phenomenon of teachers' successful experiences with Mexican American students. What are the experiences, beliefs and attributes of these White, female teachers that identify them as successful in teaching Mexican American students?

Definition of Terms

Cultural congruency – Refers to how teachers alter their communication styles to match those of their students.

Cultural mismatch – Occurs when the culture of the educational system and teachers differs from that of the students.

Cultural relevance – In this study refers to White teachers who feel personally invested in the education of their students of color.

Deficit thinking – Refers to educators who label students as "disadvantaged" due to their lifestyle, language, income, or ethnicity.

Low socioeconomic status (SES) – Students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch in public schools according federal guidelines.

Mexican American students –For the purpose of this study, Mexican American students refers to students of Mexican heritage.

White female teachers – Female teachers who identify their ethnicity as White, Caucasian, or Anglo.

Significance of Study

This study examined how teachers' perceptions, experiences, and beliefs impact the success or failure of low-SES, Mexican American children. This project provides educators with important information about the role of the White, female teacher in the education of Mexican American students. It explored critically teachers' life experiences as well as perceptions of themselves and of their Mexican American students. Research has concentrated on teachers' educational philosophies and practices and has left out discussions on how and why teachers become successful participants in the education of minority students. Despite abundant research on the poor achievement of minority students, there is significantly less research about successful teachers of minority students. Furthermore, it is not clear if these "successful" teachers have acquired the critical understanding and commitment necessary for the successful education of minority students. Few studies have brought to the forefront the issue of teachers' perceptions of their students of color and how their different lived experiences, attitudes, and beliefs play out in the success or the failure of their students (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; McKenzie, 2001). This research may shed light on how and why successful White teachers of minority

students become socially aware and committed to all children. In addition, given teacher demographics, this inquiry contributes to the understanding of how White educators view interrelationships between cultures, socioeconomics, and the relationships between themselves and their students. This type of knowledge base could lead to further examination of the role of the university and teacher education programs in preparing preservice teachers.

Limitations of the Research

Several limitations are evident with this study. The most obvious limitation was the similarity of my experiences with those of the participants. Most of my work (20 years) as a teacher, administrator, and principal has been with Mexican American students. It is difficult to assume absolute objectivity because my personal biases may have influenced the process of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data. However, once the researcher is conscious of possible deficiencies, he/she can take precautions to avoid them. Nonetheless, though my experiences may have prejudiced my perspective, they also served as a heuristic tool to see beyond what was not shared or observed (Patton, 1990).

Another possible limitation is the perceived lack of generality of qualitative research. Because this was an exploratory study, making generalizations would be

problematic. Then again, that is not the intent or purpose of qualitative research or my study.

Time constraints were also a limitation in terms of setting up the research schedule. It was difficult and time intensive to coordinate interviews and observations such that the schedules did not interrupt the instructional time of the participants and the students.

Conclusion

Examining the beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of 4 White, female teachers identified as "successful" was anticipated to provide new perspectives to the effective teaching practices of minority students. Research clearly indicates that minority students continue to fail in the U.S. public school system. When I proposed this research project it was my hope that the data would reveal the attributes necessary to develop an educational process to prepare teachers to deal effectively with a diverse population and bring forth dialogue of highly effective, successful teachers. In addition, I hoped a study of this nature could provide another framework for viewing effective teaching of low-SES, minority students.

This research critically explored how teachers' perceptions and beliefs impact the success or failure of low-SES, Mexican American children; results provide educators with important information about the role of the teacher in the education of

low-SES, minority students. This type of inquiry could lead to further examination of the role of the university and teacher education programs in preparing prospective teachers.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature, examines the research, and probes the possible causes of school failure of students of color such as deficit thinking and the theory of poverty. Chapter 2 also considers theories of cultural congruence and culturally relevant teaching as well as the divergent demographics between teachers and students. Chapter 3 explains the primary focus of my research. It describes the methodology I used and the rationale for qualitative research. Chapter 3 offers a brief description of participant selection, interviewing protocols, and data collection procedures. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the emergent themes. Chapter 6 concludes this dissertation with discussion and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Children of color continue to be plagued with the highest dropout rate, misplacement and overrepresentation in special education, overage for grade level, and underrepresentation in gifted and talented and advanced placement programs (Cummins, 1989, 1997; Valencia, 1991). The cause of these problems has been attributed, according to a large body of research (Dunn, 1987; Payne, 1995; Ryan, 1971), to students' families, their neighborhoods, and the students themselves. Such research typically has defined the students, their families, and their neighborhoods as "culturally deprived" or "disadvantaged." As a result of these deficit-oriented definitions the public school system has continued to design programs to remediate or compensate for these students' "deficiencies." The educators running these programs, using a therapeutic discourse, commonly view the children as *pobrecitos* (poor little children) who need to be saved (Garza, 1998).

Achievement Gap

The problem with this *pobrecito* or "disadvantaged" child approach is that children of color continue to experience considerable school failure. In other words,

repeated efforts at school reform focused on academic success of children of color, including effective school models (Comer, 1989; Glasser, 1990), have produced little success. In fact, a wide array of data (National Education Assessment of Educational Progress, 1999; Texas Education Association [TEA], 2001) indicates that the gap between the school success of children of color and that of middle-class, Anglo children continues to be an area of concern. For example, in 1994 African American students scored 33.3% on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills [TAAS] for all tests taken, and in 2000 they scored 68.0%. Hispanic students scored 41.1% on TAAS for all tests taken in 1994, and 6 years later (2000) they scored 71.8%. Anglo students scored 69.4% on TAAS for all tests taken in 1994 and 89.3% on the assessment in 2000. This 6-year span shows that while all students have made gains and the achievement gap has narrowed, it is still significantly wide.

The average point difference between minority and White students from 1994 to 2000 is still close to 20 points. In this 6-year period the gap has closed only 12 points. In 1994 the average gap between minority students (Hispanic and African American) and White students was 32.2 percentage points. Six years later there was still a 12.8% average gap. The minor gains on TAAS are not matched on any other measure of educational achievement.

The Intercultural Development Research Association conducted a comprehensive longitudinal statewide study (Cárdenas, Robledo, & Supik, 2001). The

Texas study spanned a 16 years, 1986–2000. Using high school attrition data that documented the number and percent of public school students who leave school prior to graduation, the study found that the overall attrition rate increased by 21% from 1986 to 2001, and that the gap grew between the attrition rates of Black and Hispanic students and those of White students. From 1986 to 2002 attrition rates for Hispanic students increased from 45% to 52% (7 percentage points). This translates to a 16% increase in the attrition rate for Hispanic students. During the same time period the attrition rates for Black students increased from 34% to 46% (12 percentage points). This was a phenomenal growth of 35%.

These data help to illustrate, support, and validate the argument that today's schools have failed to develop a critical, pedagogical, educational environment that is effective for and relevant to the needs of children of color. The evidence is clear that continued focus on the families, neighborhoods, or the students as the source of the problem, with remediation as the answer, has not worked.

In response, some scholars (Delpit, 1995; Scheurich, 1998; Valencia, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999) have raised the issue that the problem lies mainly with the educational system rather than with the families, neighborhoods, or students. These researchers have suggested that public school educators typically operate from a deficit thinking perspective in regards to children of color.

Deficit thinking theory refers most often to capricious labeling of low-SES, minority students and their families as "disadvantaged," "at risk," and "uninvolved." Deficit thinking theory blames school failure on the students' lack of readiness to learn, the parents' lack of interest in preparing them, and the families' general lifestyle.

Deficit Thinking Research

The deficit thinking paradigm has several implications for teachers and students (Cummins, 1989; Ryan, 1971; Valencia, 1991). Those who accept the deficit thinking theory and use the children's lifestyle as an excuse for failure succinctly imply that children who are culturally different are inherently less competent, less intelligent, less capable, and less motivated than the children of the more affluent, dominant culture. Educators who operate from the deficit thinking perspective suggest that unless children of color change their culture, values, and physical appearance, they have little or no chance to be successful in school. Teachers who accept this paradigm are also saying that nothing is wrong with their pedagogy, teaching practices, methodologies, or school system. Therefore, they will continue to operate the same way, and students must learn to adapt to the programs available to them or fail. According to this approach, the solution for improvement is beyond the teacher's and school system's realm of influence and power.

Educators' deficit thinking has obvious detrimental consequences for students (Cummins, 1989; Valencia, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999). Teachers who perceive students as having low ability develop low expectations and teach them differently than other students when applying a pedagogy that is grounded in the deficit thinking paradigm. These teachers are more likely to have higher expectations of those perceived to be "high achievers." Consequently, they instinctively submit the "high achievers" to a more rigorous and challenging curriculum that allows them opportunities to utilize higher order thinking skills. Conversely, the students who are perceived as "low achievers" are not exposed to the same rigorous curriculum. Instead, they are tracked into vocational programs and low-level remediation classes, usually with teachers who are less competent or who are new to the profession and have low expectations for their students (Oakes, 1995). Valencia and Solórzano (1997) discussed current theories about inadequate parenting, homes, and children as they relate to education. They cited a prevalent belief that parents of color do not value and are not involved in education, viewpoints the authors refute by citing multiple examples of how parents of color have advocated for better education for their children.

By focusing on the reasons for failure of low-SES students of color in a system designed for White, middle-class children, studies like that of Valencia and Solórzano have failed to generate effective long-term solutions. They have failed to address the interaction between sociocultural, environmental, and personal factors of

these students and their families (Alva & Padilla, 1995). In fact, as an educator in various positions in the public school system, I have spent countless hours engaged in conference sessions with teachers and other school staff. These discussions invariably promote and give legitimacy to the deficit thinking model and are based on assumptions that the children or their families can and need to be "fixed." Using the counseling model (Glasser, 1990) based on White, middle-class norms, these teams of educators spend an excessive amount of time judging families' parenting skills, their lack of involvement, and poor money management and lamenting and demeaning the lifestyles of these failing students and their families. These groups of professionals have different ideas on how to "fix" the students so that they can adapt to the system and become "successful." The real discussion is basically about assimilation. These professionals are engaged in discussions about the failure of low-achieving students to assimilate. Ironically, they want them to conform and assimilate into a system that is not open to them.

Some of the comments referring to the behavior often defined as dysfunctional are the following:

- "It's their culture."
- "They have so many children that they don't have time to give them the attention they need."
- "The parents don't know how to care.''

- "They're not involved."
- "They don't speak English."

Often the team suggests calling in the school psychologist for observation and testing. Thus, a room full of educators who profess equity actually facilitate conformity to the system, and conformity implies submission. This therapy narrative suggests that these "deviant" children and their families can be redeemed if they would just follow the advice of the "expert" educators. The implication is that the principal role of the school is to act as the first link of a chain of influences that cause the "deficient" child to accept and be accepted by the White, middle-class culture.

Theory of Poverty

Sleeter (1992) found that some White teachers use alternative theories, such as theories about poverty, in explaining the underachievement of students of color to minimize the issue of race in education. This is problematic because, though SES is critical, the poverty theory perspective ignores system problems in schools related to race and ethnicity that hinder the academic success of minority students. The poverty discourse promotes that the loss of economic opportunities are due to deviant values and cultural practices, not to the social structure constraints placed upon people of color. Therefore, the poor deserve to be poor, or at least they are poor because they lack the proper values necessary to make the system work for them (Katz & Ivey,

1989). Explaining poverty in this framework exempts society, racism, and structural inequities from any responsibility.

Chamberlain (1999) studied three European American teachers deemed successful in teaching culturally and linguistically different children with mild disabilities and found they were successful for a variety of reasons. These successful teachers also believed that poverty was a major factor in their students' underachievement. These teachers related poverty to the lack of education of the parents and their inability to provide educational support to their children. The study did not address the social justice issues related to poverty or the protective factors that the low-SES parents might have provided their children that encouraged their success.

Garza (1998) studied successful Hispanic migrant students and suggested that these students succeeded because their parents provided the essential security and protective factors that created support for them while they formed meaningful relationships within the school system. Garza's study did not address how these protective factors and environmental resources can be seen as an advantage by the school system and school personnel.

Cultural Congruency and Cultural Relevance Theories

There seems to be a persistent theme in the literature in regard to culturally relevant teaching. The main focus is on the quality of the relationships that culturally relevant teachers establish with their students. Culturally relevant teachers are described as teachers who feel personally invested in the education of children of color; because of this they can avoid the cultural mismatch that has often been cited as a major problem between White teachers and students of color.

Culturally relevant educators view education for children of color as an additive rather than a subtractive process (Cummins, 1989; Valenzuela, 1999). As a result, culturally relevant teachers see their students' culture and lifestyle as an asset rather than as a determinant or an obstacle to their learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Therefore, as suggested by Delpit (1995), these culturally relevant teachers must have a political understanding of the education system, and their actions need to be sensitive and supportive of the antiracism and anti-oppression struggles of students of color. Regardless of their culture of origin, culturally relevant teachers share an understanding of systemic inequity, of the political, economic, and racial structures that disproportionately limit the opportunities of children of color.

Other studies that have examined the breakdown of relationships between teachers and students (Delpit, 1995, Valdéz, 1996, Valenzuela, 1999) have looked at the mismatch of teacher–student relationships in terms of cultural appropriateness,

cultural congruence, and cultural relevance. Cárdenas and Cárdenas (1977) referred to this mismatch as incompatibility. Through their model, the theory of incompatibilities, they expressed the belief that minority children's failure in schools is due to the lack of compatibility between their characteristics and the characteristics of a typical instructional program. "An instructional program developed for a White, Anglo Saxon, English speaking middle class school population cannot be adequate for a non-White, non Anglo Saxon, non-English speaking, or non-middle class population" (Cárdenas & Cárdenas, p. 1). Cultural appropriateness is evident when educators use the students' own culture to improve academic skills by making meaningful connections to their culture (Au & Jordan, 1981). Another explanation for underachievement of children of color is the cultural incongruity between teachers from mainstream cultural backgrounds and their students. Cultural congruence or incongruence refers to how teachers alter their patterns of speech and communication styles to match those of their students (Erickson, 1987). Cultural relevance (Ladson-Billings, 1994) uses the students' culture in order to maintain it.

Culturally relevant teachers have been defined as teachers who care not only professionally, but also personally about their students. Often this commitment derives from sharing and understanding the culture of their students and interweaving the students' culture and language into the curriculum. Culture clash or cultural incongruency does not acknowledge the reality of class, gender, and ethnic diversity

within any community and therefore implies an essentialist quality to social distinctions and suggests an impervious barrier that impedes understanding between members of social groups. As Delpit (1995) observed,

> One of the most difficult tasks we face as human beings is communicating meaning across our individual differences, a task confounded immeasurably when we attempt to communicate across social lines, racial lines, cultural lines, or lines of unequal power. (p. 66)

She also named another key problem in education: the distinction made by educators, policymakers and the general public between "our children" and "other people's children." She argued that given the persistent beliefs in the superiority of White, middle-class culture many students are seen as different or "other" for being poor, of color, or from immigrant families. Children that do not belong to the culture of power that Delpit (1995), Valdéz (1996) and others have identified are excluded from the social, political, and economic opportunities to which formal education provides access. Instead, they are pushed to the edge of academic failure and continued social abandonment.

Beauboeuf (1997) in her study of six African American female teachers and how they engaged in culturally relevant teaching found that successful African American teachers saw teaching as a form of mothering. Beauboeuf asserted from her findings that good teaching is less about cultural similarities between students and teachers and more about the "political clarity" of the teachers. As defined by Beauboeuf, teachers with political clarity recognize the existence of oppression in

their students' lives and seek to use their personal and social power as adults and as teachers to encourage children to understand and undermine their subordination. She suggested renaming *culturally relevant* teaching *politically relevant* teaching. By examining politically relevant teaching among six African American women, she found that they brought maternal, political, and moral concerns to their pedagogy. She referred to their teaching as politicized mothering. These teachers challenged their students and themselves to learn, to grow, and not to become complacent or resigned to the status quo.

Chamberlain (1999) studied three European American teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse special education students. His findings indicated that all these teachers were deemed successful for a variety of reasons, but all three teachers displayed qualities of self-awareness, specifically an awareness of their own limitations and an understanding that they must learn from others, including their students.

Discussion

Effects of Deficit Thinking

The focus on deficit thinking has had a deleterious effect on "culturally disadvantaged" children, but many students have done well in school because they

have had teachers who have helped them succeed. Although the research on the poor achievement of minority students is abundant, there is significantly less research about successful teachers of minority students. Furthermore, it is not clear if these successful teachers have acquired the critical understanding and commitment necessary for the successful education of minority students. Few studies have investigated the issue of White teachers' perceptions of their students of color and how their different lived experiences, attitudes, and beliefs play out in the success or the failure of their students.

There is a continued and increasing demographic and cultural mismatch between students and teachers in both public schools and institutions of higher learning. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the deficit thinking paradigm is highly pervasive in both these institutions and consequently perpetuates the White value system as the norm. Statistics also show increasing ethnic, cultural, and language mismatches between students and teachers in public schools, colleges, and universities.

Divergent Demographics: Children of Color and White Teachers

The dramatic increase in poor, non-White, and immigrant students in U.S. public schools serves as a warning of the urgent need to understand and challenge the ideologies of prospective teachers in teacher education programs. Within the next two

decades classrooms in public schools in most large cities will net a majority of African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans and Native Americans. By the year 2050, Whites will make up 52.8% of the U.S. population; Hispanics, 24.5%; Blacks, 13.6%; and Asian Americans, 8.2% (NCES, 1996). The challenge is not only to prepare a White, female, middle-class teaching population to work with diverse student groups, but also to discover how they have come to know and recognize what guides their pedagogy.

As reported by the NCES (1996), enrollment in schools, colleges, and departments of education includes 86.5% White students, 6.8% African American students, and 2.7% Latino students. These figures clearly illustrate that a growing percentage of predominantly White higher education faculty are preparing a growing percentage of predominantly White student teachers to educate a growing population of public school students who are very different from them racially, ethnically, linguistically, and economically.

The teaching force is becoming increasingly White, approximately 88%, while the student population will soon be over 50% non-White. The continued change in demographics leading to a majority of students that are non-White requires that teacher preparation programs be designed to prepare aspiring teachers to teach and interact appropriately with these students. Whereas the students in U.S. urban schools are primarily poor and of color, the majority of their teachers are monolingual,

White, middle-class women (Zeichner, 1993). This difference of ethnic, cultural, and language background fuels a culture clash that is a barrier to the successful achievement of these students. This barrier leads to the marginalization of children of color. "Marginality evolves when children are socialized away from their communities and families of origin" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 264). With an increasingly White teaching force teaching non-White students, it is imperative that the teachers understand and challenge the oppressive structure.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Though many investigations of culturally relevant teaching have focused on teachers of color, there is no intrinsic relationship between such teaching and educators of color. In other words, not all culturally relevant teachers are teachers of color, and not all teachers of color hold culturally relevant views towards their profession (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Bourdieu (1982) expressed a different perspective on deficit thinking and education. He posited that increased access to higher education to the lower classes only serves to create new forms of social stratification and power relationships. Bourdieu also proposed that education is not the great equalizer, but a maintenance strategy in social reproduction. He asserted that education reproduces rather than redistributes capital culture.

> Teachers are the products of a system whose aim is to transmit an aristocratic culture, and are likely to adopt its values with greater ardor in proportion to the degree to which they owe it their own academic and social success. How indeed could they avoid unconsciously bringing into play the values of the milieu from which they come, or to which they wish to belong, when teaching and assessing their pupils? Thus, in higher education, the working or lower middle class student will be judged according to the scale of values of the educated classes which many teachers owe to their social origin and which they willingly adopt. (Bourdieu, 1982, p. 399, as cited by Bartelomé & Trueba, 2000, p. 282)

Research on prospective teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and preferences suggests that teachers prefer to teach students who are like themselves and to teach in communities that are familiar to them. Most preservice teachers very clearly state that they do not want to teach in inner-city schools or to work with minority or immigrant students (Zeichner, 1993). However, as a principal of an elementary school with a high-minority population, I often hear prospective teachers declare their love for "these kinds of kids." They want to teach in a school where they are "needed" and they want to "show these kinds of students that they can succeed in spite of their home life." These prospective teachers are usually White, female, and middle class. What is more disturbing is a teacher who has lived the "culturally disadvantaged" lifestyle, has broken the barrier into the mainstream, and then proceeds to perpetuate this same deficit dialogue. In conversation with a 17-year veteran teacher, with whom I have close family ties, this assimilationist attitude surfaced. As a child this woman came to the United States from Mexico with her family to do migrant fieldwork. She recalled moving to different schools and never having any instruction in her native

Spanish language. She remembered being told not to speak Spanish. She seemed to have uncritically accepted the assimilationist views. When I asked her about teaching in a bilingual classroom she responded, "I won't teach bilingual students, they are harder to teach." The loss of opportunity does not end in the classroom. This same teacher has two children of her own who are being brought up to be monolingual English speakers. Consequently, her children are not able to communicate with their grandparents and other relatives who speak only Spanish. This scenario is an example of the detrimental consequences when minorities are socialized away from their families (Bourdieu, 1982; Valenzuela, 1999).

Perpetuating the Social Order and Marginalization

The impact of continuing present practices at teacher education colleges, universities, and K–12 schools is the continued marginalization of minority children and an even greater loss of human social capital. "Where are the voices to challenge the dysconscious racism so prevalent among perspective teachers?" (King, 1993, p. 226). Delpit (1995) asserted that it is of crucial importance that White educators realize that there is another voice and another reality. It is equally important that White educators look at their race and at racism and its impact on their teaching practices.

Literature on academic failure and success of minority students is abundant. Much of the focus has been to look critically at the relationships of teachers and

students and how power and privilege play out in the interactions of teachers from the White power group with students and families from the subordinate groups. Ladson-Billings (1994, p. 33) maintained, "If teachers pretend not to see students' racial and ethnic differences they do not see the students at all, and are therefore are limited in their ability to meet their educational needs." Sleeter (1992) posited, "White teachers commonly insist that they are 'colorblind': that they see children as children and do not see race" (p. 161). She then asked, "What does it mean to construct an interpretation of race that denies it?" Colorblindness means not valuing diversity and to teach to that end. The goal is not to be colorblind, but to see color and embrace the diversity. Teachers need to respect and learn from those whose life experiences are different from their own. Delpit (1995) stated, "The world views of those with privileged positions are taken as the only reality, while the world views of those less powerful are dismissed as inconsequential" (p. xv).

Valdéz' (1996) study looked at 10 recent Mexican immigrant parent and school interactions and presented insights on how family traditions and beliefs are altered by well-intentioned teachers. She suggested that mainstream school intervention programs are developed and implemented without knowledge of families' lived experiences and expectations. These programs are based on White privilege, White power group norms, and the deficit paradigm. The research seems to point to an overt and covert aim. Overtly the goal is to educate all students in the American

public school system. Covertly, it is to Anglicize minority students and strip them of their language and culture.

Cummins (1981, 1989, 1997) addressed the persistent patterns of coercive relations of power in society; no school or classroom is immune from the influence of coercive power. He stated that by no means are teachers powerless; they have the power to challenge the societal power structure, to promote and advocate for students' linguistic and cultural talents, and to bridge the gap between home and school. He also asserted that teachers' successful interactions with students reflect the ways they have defined their own roles or identities as educators. Cummins (1997) described a triangular set of images that teachers negotiate with their students: (a) an image of their own identities as educators, (b) an image of the identity options that are being highlighted for students to consider (i.e., critical inquiry), and (c) an image of the society into which students will graduate and be prepared to contribute.

More recent research on the education of U.S. Mexican youth done by Valenzuela (1999) offered evidence that deficit thinking leads to low expectations and strips students of their social capital, creating what she termed *subtractive schooling*. She suggested that depriving students of important social and cultural resources confines them to an environment that is noncaring and nonaccepting and leaves them vulnerable to academic failure. Valenzuela's notion of subtractive schooling implies that children who experience academic failure have lost sight of who they really are.

They have experienced that pain of marginality because they are not part of the hegemonic culture and they refuse to identify with their own ethnicity. Thus, the self-concepts and self-esteem of these children is adversely impacted. Research supports the theory that learning is directly connected with self-concept and self-esteem (Cummins, 1989). Focus on identity is crucial in understanding the educational difficulties of many language and culturally diverse students. Groups that tend to experience academic difficulties frequently manifest a pattern of insecurity or ambivalence about the value of their own cultural identity as a result of their interactions with the dominant group. Ogbu's (1978, 1987) notion of "cultural inversion" suggests that students either consciously or unconsciously oppose the cultural practices and discourses associated with the dominant group as a form of resistance (see Willis, 1982). Ogbu (1987) also discussed underachievement of minorities in terms of a cultural-ecological framework. This notion stresses that historical oppression and institutional racism is a major factor in shaping minorities' opposition to education and the conventional routes to success.

Implications for Teachers

Teachers must be encouraged and provided a space for critical examination of individual and institutionalized racism.

> Being unaware of one's own racial identity and not being able to understand or make sense of the larger system of whiteness provides a barrier that encases

> White people so that they are unable to experience themselves and their culture as it really is. (Katz & Ivey, 1977, p. 485)

What does this mean for White educators? What are the implications for White teachers of children of color? The challenge is not only how to prepare an overwhelmingly White, female, middle-class teaching population to work with diverse student groups but also to discover how they have come to know and recognize what guides their pedagogy.

Therefore, teachers need to examine how their roles, both individually and as a group, play a major part in perpetuating racism. By accepting the reality of White privilege, White teachers can be more effective in dealing with the inequities and the imbalances in the school system. Hence, to begin to alleviate the pervasive forms of racism in U.S. schools, it is essential for White teachers not only to understand the privilege of being White, but also to have an understanding of their racist tendencies.

McIntyre (1997) explored the racial identity of the classroom teacher and the system of Whiteness that is the framework of the public schools. In her study she examined attitudes of preservice teachers and how they make meaning of their Whiteness. She found that the participants believed in the ideals of individualism, hard work, and opportunity for all and were ready to reproduce this dominant discourse without question or objection to myths or stereotypes.

Other studies suggest otherwise. Ladson-Billings' (1994) study of successful teachers of African American students attributed their success to their culturally

relevant teaching practices. This practice consists of teachers and students being coconstructors in the knowledge-building process. Students are seen as bringing knowledge into the classroom, and successful teachers acknowledge the students' resilience and strengths.

Since the late 1980s the field of culturally relevant teaching has asserted that "other people's children" tend to be non-White. This literature also maintains that successful teachers of children of color are aware of the cultural distinctiveness and strengths of these students—they are not "colorblind" and do not buy into the deficit model (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sleeter, 1993). Culturally relevant teaching is a successful pedagogy because it is relevant to the cultures embodied by students of color. The literature on culturally relevant teaching has made an important contribution to the field of education in terms of exploring the beliefs and practices of teachers who successfully bridge the students from marginalized groups with academic success. It has not clarified, however, how and why some teachers become interested in conceptualizing and nurturing relationships with their students, particularly those children whom other educators see, label, and treat as problems, outsiders, and failures. In light of the fact that an increasing majority of a White female teaching force is educating an increasing non-White public school population, there is limited research in the development and significance of teacher–student relationships.

Conclusion

The challenges of power and empowerment in a system of competing visions and institutionalized racism are obstacles that must be overcome if students of color are to be given an equal life chance in the U.S. school system. The White power group by and for whom the school system was developed must be open to discussing honestly the reasons why the system fails low-SES children of color. It is imperative for teacher-education programs to become more culturally responsive through shared school–university initiatives grounded in principles of cultural recognition and political clarity.

School–community–university collaboration, cultural recognition, a model of multicultural teacher education with historical perspectives, and the development of intercultural competence are a few ways of combating racism. Teacher dialogue needs to focus on racism and its impact in the school system. In order to create effective schools for students of all backgrounds, educators should recognize that all students bring talents and strengths to their learning and should find ways to build on these talents and strengths. It is critical for educators to appreciate and understand that advocating diversity is all about social justice; educators must recognize that poor students and students of color suffer most from structural inequality.

Respecting and affirming the students who are diverse and advocating diversity means becoming a multicultural teacher (Nieto, 1992). To become a

multicultural teacher it is important to look at how power relations work in U.S. society at large and how they influence and affect the interactions between teachers and students in the classroom. To ensure that children of color succeed academically requires a willingness on the part of educators to challenge aspects of coercive power structures in their classrooms as well as in broader society.

> One cannot be a successful teacher without the political and ideological clarity that forces one to ask the questions, What content, against what, for whom and against whom? Thus, the role of a teacher can never be reduced to the mechanistic transmission of selective curriculum. (Bartelomé & Trueba, 2000, p. 280)

Teachers need to be willing to build relationships and take the risks that will provide a dignified, just, and fair life for all students. More important, teachers must be able to examine their own values, beliefs, and privileges in an honest, forthright manner (Scheurich, 1998).

Additionally, universities should take an aggressive role to give preservice teachers meaningful experiences and the opportunity to practice and reflect on what they experience in a diverse classroom. This would require that teachers be provided a platform to question their assumptions about low-SES children of color in order to understand how their beliefs affect their teaching. Teachers must explore what the concepts of culture, poverty, and language mean to them in relation to how their philosophies impact the children in their classroom. Methods for examining their perceptions about students and beliefs about teaching need to be available. In addition,

teachers should be prepared and supported to challenge the status quo of school culture if it is in the best interests of their students. Educators should also question assimilationist ideologies and build on the cultural, linguistic, and community knowledge that students bring with them to school.

Furthermore, attributes of White teachers that have proven to be successful with students of color need to be discussed and modeled in teacher preparation programs. Successful teachers may be identified as those that assist students in negotiating and navigating through the system; additionally, teachers who provide support and help students build resiliency to work in the system and maintain their cultural identity and dignity could be defined as successful (Garza, 1998; Valdéz, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999).

In contrast, those teachers who support adapting or assimilating into the system may be diminishing the very qualities that make these students successful. In other words, adapting implies that one can become part of the system, which is philosophical impossible, because the hegemonic culture of the school system excludes students based on culture, color, and language; students remain marginalized no matter how much they adapt.

Rationale for This Study

The literature has focused consistently on the alleged deficiencies of the Mexican American child, thus fostering attitudes of racial prejudice among educators (Carter & Segura, 1979). Consequently, educators have assumed that the failure of Mexican American students can be naturally attributed to their racial or cultural inferiority. Several studies have been conducted that have specifically focused on "successful" teachers (Beauboeuf, 1997, Chamberlain, 1999; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994); however, none that I am aware of have looked specifically at successful White teachers of Mexican American students. The educational statistics for Mexican American students reveal disproportionate academic underachievement in comparison with their Anglo counterparts. Little research has highlighted White teachers' perspectives on effective teaching strategies and practices for Mexican American students. For this reason, more research is needed in the area of the specific attributes that, in spite of cultural and linguistic differences, allow White, middle-class, female teachers to be effective in providing successful school experiences to low-SES, Mexican American students.

With this in mind, the need for a study like this one is justified. My study explored the beliefs and perceptions of White teachers who have been identified as effective teachers of Mexican American children in providing a successful learning environment and pedagogy. An important component is the attempt to understand

not only the pedagogy, but also how White, middle-class, female teachers have come to see their role in social justice as a personal pedagogical goal and how they see relationships between themselves and their students as well as between school and society.

Little empirical research has examined how and why teachers acquire a commitment to social justice. Given the nature of my study, I anticipated evidence of social justice advocacy to emerge. If it did, how and why did the 4 participants acquire or develop it? A study of this nature provides another framework for viewing effective teaching of low-SES, minority students.

The need for this study is further validated because it investigated an issue that has been overlooked in educational research and is missing in educational discourse. This study of White teachers of Mexican American children provides new perspectives to the effective teaching practices of minority students. This project reveals attributes that can assist in developing an educational process that can prepare teachers to deal effectively with a diverse population and bring forth dialogue of highly effective, successful, White teachers. Through this discourse, teachers can reflect on and examine practices that will lead to the suspension of deficit thinking that is pervasively embedded in educational practices.

Further research to explore critically how teachers' ideological beliefs impact the success or failure of low-SES, Mexican American children also will provide

educators with important information about the role of the White teacher in the education of low-SES, minority students. Therefore, I conducted a study to investigate the attitudes, beliefs, and life experiences of White, female teachers of Mexican American students. This study reveals teacher attributes that may assist in preparing teachers to deal effectively with a diverse population. This inquiry can lead to further examination of the role of the university and teacher-education programs in preparing prospective teachers.

The methodology for this study is presented in the following chapter. Chapter 3 includes the following: (a) research design, (b) participant and site selection, (c) data collection and data sources, (d) data analysis procedures, and (e) trustworthiness.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Question

What are the attributes that, in spite of cultural differences, allow White, middle-class, female teachers to be effective in providing a successful school experience to low-SES, Mexican American children? That is the question this study addressed. However, this study went beyond the descriptions of "good teaching" and examined not simply the actions of teachers, but also the knowledge, beliefs, and life experiences that they bring to their practice. The primary focus of this research, then, was to identify characteristics of the successful practice of White, female teachers that allow them to be successful in teaching Mexican American, low-SES students. These are teachers who have the unique ability to make a positive and lasting difference in the academic success of Mexican American children. These teachers have been identified by their administrators and peers to have the ability to work successfully with children who are often otherwise doomed to failure because of the ill-perceived capabilities perpetuated by a pervasive deficit thinking paradigm in U.S. schools.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

A fundamental belief underlying much research is that as human beings we actively create understandings of self, others, and society, and these understandings that we develop can be reflected upon and rewritten in light of new experiences and information (Cochran-Smith, 1995). In other words, through the process of critical examination, it is possible to rethink the acceptance of privilege and inequity as normative components of the social order (Bartelomé, 1994; hooks, 1994; Sleeter, 1993).

Qualitative research methods were identified as one way to accomplish this critical examination. This method has begun to receive recognition as an alternative approach to exploring and documenting diversity and life experience for individuals who live in a social world (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Attributes and features of this research, as described by Bogdan and Biklen (1982), are the following:

1. Research that has a natural setting as the direct source of data and the researcher as the key instrument,
2. Research that is descriptive,
3. Researchers who are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products,
4. Researchers who tend to analyze their data inductively, and

5. Researchers who consider meaning as essential to the qualitative approach.

These fundamental tenets, along with the naturalistic inquiry paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1985), guided the development of this proposed study.

More specifically, Guba and Lincoln (1985) defined qualitative study as a "snapshot of reality," "a slice of life," or "an episode." Qualitative studies are a preferred strategy when "how" and "when" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. Qualitative research thus allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events, which is exactly what was required for this study.

In addition, this study utilized a grounded theory approach, a specific type of qualitative research. The primary objective of using grounded theory methodology is to develop a grounded theoretical model that will explain the phenomenon of interest (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1998), who originated grounded theory, defined it as theory derived from data that are systematically gathered and analyzed throughout the research process. The researcher begins with an area of study, analyzes the data, and allows the theory to emerge from the data. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), grounded theories are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action.

Research Design

The purpose of this research, like much qualitative research, was to contribute to knowledge, help people understand the nature of a problem, and therefore generate solutions to human and societal problems (Patton, 1990). Debates among scholars about meaningfulness, relevance, and significance of various approaches to research are long standing and ongoing.

On the one side of the debate are the positivists, who are proponents and advocates of quantitative and experimental methods to test their hypothesis and generalizations. On the other side are proponents of qualitative methods who endorse the phenomenological inquiry paradigm.

This was a qualitative study using naturalistic inquiry methods (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) to develop an understanding of human behavior. My interest was to explore the specific phenomenon of White, female teachers' successful experiences with Mexican American students. What are the experiences that deem these teachers as successful in teaching Mexican American students? This study was also phenomenological in nature. I explored a particular phenomenon of individuals or groups in terms of their experiences and their interpretation or way of making sense of their surroundings (Patton, 1990).

It would be problematic to draw generalizations from the small sampling in my study, but purposive sampling was used to ensure intense information and

experience-rich sampling. Therefore, this was an exploratory study of four White, female teachers. Little or no significant research has been conducted in this area, in particular, research that focuses on the relationship between White, female teachers who have had success with Mexican American students. Virtually no studies have explored, delved into, or described the beliefs and perceptions of White female teachers towards Mexican American students.

Participant and Site Selection

Participants

"The logic and power of purposive sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Researchers use purposive sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the question under investigation.

I purposively chose participants to represent a variety of experience and to provide a wide range of information (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The participants for this particular study met specific selection criteria:

- Identify themselves as White females,
- Teach in a K–12 public school,
- Are teachers of majority Mexican American students, and

- Have at least 3 years of teaching experience.

Nomination Procedure

School administrators and principals nominated teachers identified as successful. Teachers identified themselves as White or Anglo and had experience teaching Mexican American, low-SES students.

Over 80% of the U.S. teaching force is identified as White or Anglo **(**Banks, 1991; National Education Association, 2002); therefore, the issue of cultural relevancy and cultural congruency (Ladson Billings, 1994; Ogbu, 1987) should be of particular interest and significance for White teachers. Another important reason for the study of White teachers is an absence of research exploring the issues of race, language, and ethnic diversity from the perspectives of White, female teachers. Limiting this study to White, female teachers of low-SES, Mexican American students served to narrow the focus to this particular phenomenon.

The criteria of "successful" was left open to interpretation by those submitting nominations, for the purpose of discovering what they considered to be successful teachers. These data were included as part of the study.

The nomination phase of participant selection included a letter describing the study, criteria, and nomination process (Appendix A) and a nomination form (Appendix B). The principal filled out and submitted the nomination forms for

review. A questionnaire was provided to teachers asking how long they have been teaching, what grades they have taught, and reasons for becoming teacher. The initial selection interview (Appendix C) verified their understanding of the basic concepts of the study. During the initial interview a consent form describing the nature and purpose of the study and ensuring confidentiality of the information was shared with the investigator.

Site Selection

The site was an urban school district in South Central Texas that met specific demographic criteria. The school district has a majority of Mexican American students. A group of school districts and campuses was identified using the TEA Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS).

The Politics of Gaining Access to the Research Site

One of the first challenges I encountered in preparing for this research project was the selection of a research site that met the criteria of my sampling. Besides race and ethnicity, I debated several other variables. Should it be an urban or rural school district/campus? Should it be on the Texas–Mexico border? Should it be a small or large district/campus? After several discussions with my chair, I decided on a large urban school district that met the demographic profile I needed for my study. The

school district's research study protocol required an intensive amount of paperwork. I personally called the person in charge and submitted all the required paperwork. Several weeks passed and I called the district to inquire about the status of my request. I was told that a letter had been sent. Since the person I spoke with did not tell me if it had been accepted or rejected, I assumed that everything was fine. I was wrong. The following day I received a letter stating that due to "numerous assessments occurring at our schools" the district "would not be able to adequately meet" my needs.

To my surprise, several weeks later, I received another letter from the same district stating, "After further clarification your research study…has been approved." The person in charge of approving research proposals for the district had been informed that my husband was a colleague and friend of the school superintendent. My husband and I had agreed that we would not let his relationship with the superintendent influence the approval process, because I did not want to compromise the integrity of the research process. After the initial rejection, my husband casually informed the superintendent that my proposal had been rejected. The superintendent expressed his regrets and told my husband that if he had known he would have red-flagged it for approval. That was precisely what I was trying to avoid. Although the superintendent did not say anything else, it is very likely that he intervened in the reconsideration and final approval of my proposal.

I decided, for obvious personal reasons, to find another school district that matched the demographics I needed for my study. This time I was not as naïve about the politics. I learned that gaining access and entry into a school district is difficult when you are an outsider, and naturally people tend to support people they know. This time I used my own connections to help me navigate the system. I was approved to do my study in a neighboring urban school district.

After the superintendent approved and signed my research proposal request, I was instructed to contact the assistant superintendent to proceed with the study. I immediately met with the assistant superintendent in her office and gave her a copy of my study proposal, the university's Institutional Review Board approval, and the superintendent's signed authorization form. I explained the purpose of my study and she said that she had two principals who had already agreed to meet with me. The meeting was brief but very productive. When I called one of the principals to set up a meeting, I was surprised when she said that she did not know anything about my study. I proceeded to explain my study to the principal over the phone. The principal, Margaret Mason, was very receptive. She seemed interested in my study and was very accommodating. We agreed to communicate via e-mail to set up a convenient time to meet. Margaret believed she had several teachers that qualified and met the conditions of my study. She was very prompt and thorough with the nomination of successful, White, female teachers. Margaret set up a time for me to

meet with all the teachers to explain my study and ask for their participation and consent.

Demographics and Description of the School District

The Woodburn Independent School District is located on the west side of one of Texas' largest cities. The student population for the school district is approximately 13,000 students. The student demographic breakdown is as follows: 97% Hispanic, 1% White, 2% African American, 0.1% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.1% Native American. Ninety-five percent of the student body is considered economically disadvantaged. Districtwide, the teacher demographics are not reflective of the student population. Hispanic teachers comprise 63.3% of the total teacher group, followed by 30.2% White, 5.3% African American, 1.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.1% Native American. The district has 22 schools: 13 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, 2 high schools, 2 alternative schools, and one secondary academy (TEA, 2004).

Woodburn's history dates back to 1905 when the school district was established. The school district gained state and national attention with its prominent role and involvement in federal lawsuits that helped change public school funding in the state. Over 30 years ago, Woodburn parents challenged the state of Texas regarding funding inequities among Texas public school districts. This challenge

initiated a federal lawsuit that changed public school funding dramatically. The final product of this legal effort came to be known as the "Robin Hood" model, because property-rich school districts were mandated to share their wealth with property-poor school districts. The equalization debate continues in the state legislature today, but this time the challenge is from the rich school districts that were forced to share their wealth.

Demographics and Description of the Elementary School

The demographics of Fordham Elementary parallel the demographics of the district except for the teachers. Ninety-five percent of the 600 students are Hispanic. Ninety-eight percent are labeled economically disadvantaged, and 21% are identified as limited English proficient. The campus employed 34 teachers in 2003–2004. Nineteen teachers are Hispanic (56%), 14 are White (41%), and 1 is African American (3%). The leadership team consists of a female principal and male vice-principal; both are White (TEA, 2004). According to the criteria of the AEIS, Fordham has achieved either Exemplary or Recognized campus status during the past several years. Fordham Elementary was considered a Recognized campus for the 2003–2004 school year. To achieve a Recognized rating, an average of 80% of all students and subgroups must pass each of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) tests (Reading,

Math, Writing, and Science). In 2004–2005 the administration and staff were concerned that they would not move up to an Exemplary rating.

Data Collection and Data Sources

I used multiple rounds of open-ended, one-to-one interviews as the main technique for data collection. Unstructured interviews are used in grounded theory studies to learn how participants interpret particular aspects of their lives and experiences. The goal of unstructured open-ended interviews is to understand the participants' way of life through their eyes, as they see it, using their own words. It is important for the researcher to begin the interview with general questions, moving to more specific areas as the interview progresses. This is done to ensure that the participant, not the researcher, guides the content and pace of the interview (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). An interview guide or protocol was developed for this project in accordance with the guidelines of naturalistic inquiry. It was unstructured, overt (for ethical reasons), in depth, and open ended (Yin, 1989). I also conducted observations in their natural setting in order to build depth in my data. I was interested in how the participants reason through their pedagogy and if it transferred to their practice. This also allowed for a measure of triangulation to address the issue of trustworthiness. A major goal of this study was to explain the perceptions, beliefs, and practices held by White female teachers that allow them to be successful in teaching Mexican American,

low-SES children. I followed the participants' lead and "grounded" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) my theory in the teachers' descriptions and interpretations of their lives, their beliefs, and their classroom practices. Later interviews were used to probe issues that seemed to hold particular meaning to the teachers and their pedagogy. The final phase of data collection was a group interview.

The data collection involved six phases. After the 4 teacher participants had been identified and agreed to participate, Phase I interviewing began.

Phase I interviews were held at the participating teachers' campus at a convenient time as determined by each participant. During this phase the focus of the investigator was to build trust and form a relationship with the teacher. This was also the time to introduce and discuss the study, answer questions, and provide clarification. Phase I interviews lasted approximately 2 hours. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed for analysis.

Phase II involved the observation of teachers in their classrooms. During the classroom observation, I focused on the classroom environment, teacher behaviors, relationships of teacher to student and student to student, presentation of curriculum, verbal and nonverbal interactions, and formal and informal communication. The necessary time was allotted to debrief after each observation.

Phase III interviews were approximately 1 to 2 hours long. This time was an arena for discussing what I observed during the classroom observation and to ask

follow-up questions from the observation. The questions addressed not only the teacher's educational practices, but also their beliefs and perceptions about their students. Participants read transcripts and gave feedback regarding accuracy.

Phase IV observations continued to provide a context for the interview data and perspectives. Phase IV also revealed the relationship these perspectives had to the teachers' actions and thus to their being identified as successful teachers.

Phase V consisted of another follow-up interview. During this interview, I discussed observation data and continued probing the relationships and perspectives of the identified teachers.

Phase VI of the process was member checking and peer debriefing, crucial techniques for establishing credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). This final phase of interviewing was an opportunity to meet with the participants and inquire about the accuracy of the information and interpretation of the participant's realities. This interaction also provided an opportunity for the participant to volunteer additional information that contributed to the conceptualization of the purpose of the study, to discover what teachers do that defines them as successful. This was an informal opportunity to observe how the teachers respond to each other's experiences.

Data Analysis and Coding Procedures

Data Analysis

Transforming a large amount of data into a meaningful interpretation is a major challenge for the qualitative researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1985). For this study, both theoretical and descriptive analytic strategies were used. Data analysis began immediately with the first data collection. Following the completion of each individual interview, I listened to the audiotapes, studied the field notes, and reflected on the observations.

I transcribed the audiotapes in order to become more familiar with the data and therefore to facilitate the identification of emerging themes or categories. I rechecked the thoroughness of the data transcript by listening to each taped interview while simultaneously reading the transcript in order to make any changes as needed.

Data analysis is an ongoing process. It develops in stages and for several purposes. Data analysis began during single interviews and proceeded from interview to interview and from observation to observation with a given participant and site. Individual participant reports were the product of organized data from which grounded theory could develop.

Coding Procedures

Data analysis continued with the data-coding process. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 13) the purpose of coding procedures is the following:

1. Build rather than test theory.
2. Provide researchers with analytic tools for handling masses of raw data.
3. Help analysts to consider alternative meanings of phenomena.
4. Be systematic and creative simultaneously.
5. Identify, develop, and relate the concepts that are the building blocks of theory.

Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 57) defined coding as the "operations by which data are broken down, conceptualized and put back together in new ways." Data collection and data analysis are processes that at times occur simultaneously. "Analysis is not a structured, static, or rigid process. Rather, it is a free-flowing and creative one in which analysts move quickly back and forth between types of coding, using analytic techniques procedures" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 58). The overlapping nature of the data collection and analysis processes is a constant comparative method because the researcher has the opportunity to review the data and make comparisons throughout the analysis process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

A researcher's goal is to "build creative, grounded, and dense theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 99). Grounded theory analysis is facilitated using three specific

types of coding procedures identified by Strauss and Corbin (1998): (a) open, (b) axial, and (c) selective coding. These three types of coding procedure were used to analyze the vast amount of data that were collected for this study.

Open coding is used during the initial phase of analysis. It is the analytic process during which concepts are identified, grouped, and categorized. Open coding is used at the stage of conceptualization (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)

Axial coding is the process of making connections between the categories identified during the open-coding process. They are "axial because coding occurs around the axis of a category linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123).

Selective coding occurs during the last phase of data analysis. It is the integration stage where theory is refined. During this stage, the categories are organized around the central themes that emerged during the open- and axial-coding processes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Trustworthiness

According to Guba and Lincoln (1985), the criteria necessary to ensure trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These variables were observed carefully to address the trustworthiness and credibility of this study.

Triangulation

Data were collected using various methods and from a variety of sources to ensure credibility. Although the main source of data collection was the in-depth, open-ended interviews, other data were used for the purpose of triangulation. These additional data sources included document and record analysis, field notes, and observations.

Transferability

Transferability judgments are possible when the researcher provides a thick description generated from the data base (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). This study provided a large body of data collected from various sources and using various techniques.

Dependability

To ensure dependability, the researcher should be cautious giving attention to the data collection methods and how the data are organized, managed, and analyzed. Such caution was used in this study. Dependability was also enhanced through triangulation.

Confirmability

Confirmability was established by utilizing a combination of techniques. These included the confirmability audit, triangulation, and the reflexive journal as suggested by Guba (1981, cited in Guba & Lincoln, 1985). An audit trail was established through field notes, transcriptions, audiotapes, document analysis summaries, recordings of interviews, and computer database files.

Additional Techniques

Several other techniques as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were observed and used for this study. These included sustained and prolonged engagement, a reflexive journal, and member checking. I spent long hours with the study participants. Additionally, I kept extensive field notes in a reflexive journal to include thoughts, emotions, feelings, and detailed information regarding places, things, and people relevant to the study. Finally, I used member checking. The overarching goal of member checking is to ensure that the interpretations are consistent with the participants' intended meaning. The participants had an opportunity to review the interview transcriptions to make additional contributions and clarifications. Each participant was provided a copy of the first draft and given an opportunity to reflect and respond.

This chapter explained the methodology of data collection and analysis used in this study. Chapter 4 presents the results of analysis of data collected from the 4 participants in this study identified as successful, White, female teachers of Mexican American students.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The main purpose of this chapter is to report the data collected from the 4 participants who were identified and nominated for this study as successful, White, female teachers of Mexican American students. I have organized this chapter into the following sections: (a) Profile of the Campus and Community and (b) Teacher Profiles and Reporting of the Data, including emerging themes such as perceptions of culture, perceptions of parents and their role, teachers' perceptions of students, expectations and success, underachievement of Mexican American students, and standardized tests.

Profile of the Campus and Community

As noted in chapter 3, the demographics of Fordham Elementary parallel the demographics of the district except for the teachers. Ninety-five percent of the 600 students are Hispanic, 98% are low SES, and 21% are limited English proficient. Of the teachers, 56% are Hispanic, 41% are White, and 3% (one teacher) are African American. According to the criteria of the AEIS, Fordham has achieved either Exemplary or Recognized campus status during the past several years. Fordham Elementary was considered a Recognized campus for the 2003–2004 school year. In

2004–2005 the administration and staff were concerned that they would not move up to an Exemplary rating.

It was not until early September 2004 that I was finally able to arrange for my first interviews at Fordham Elementary. I was unfamiliar with this large urban area and its intertwining expressways and did not know where the campus was located. I decided that I would leave early so would not be late if I got lost. I got to the general area of the school district and I drove around the neighborhood looking for a grocery store. I found the school but no convenience store. It was still early and I continued to explore the neighborhood. I eventually found a little store and stopped to pick some things. It was hard to find anything, the shelves were disheveled, and the item I needed was not available. I asked the clerk if there were other stores close by and she directed me to Ben's, a locally owned store on the main street. I tried to pay with my credit card. The clerk said that they did not accept credit cards. I asked for an ATM machine, and no ATM was available. I searched the bottom of my purse for change instead. I share this only to make this point: This neighborhood was like many impoverished areas. Residents here lack access to full-service stores, larger grocery chain stores, building supply centers, banks, and other facilities that those in more affluent neighborhoods may take for granted.

Fordham Elementary is a classic neighborhood school, located in the outskirts of a large urban area. The school sits across the street from rows of homes that are

mostly wood frame and are well kept. Neighbors can be seen chatting over chain-link fences. Almost all the children walk to and from school. I noticed that every afternoon many of the parents and grandparents walked to the school to pick up their children. The marquee read, "Be a Star." Many teachers have been at Fordham long enough to be teaching second- and even third-generation students. The district does provide one special education bus that picks up four students at Fordham.

I entered the office and announced my arrival to the secretary. She told me the principal would be with me in a moment. I took a seat along with two boys who were sitting in the office waiting to see the assistant principal. They tried to get my attention by talking loudly and acting out. After a few minutes the assistant principal came out, rolled his eyes, and separated the boys, taking one boy into his office and the other into another empty room. He returned and explained, "These boys are troublemakers. They were retained, so we are in for a real fun year." He called the teacher and told her to write a referral. He returned to me and asked if I was the lady who was going to conduct research at the campus. Although I did not ask him any questions, he described another situation in detail. He explained that a parent had sent her sister (the child's aunt) to pick up her sick daughter without proper identification, and the office staff would not release the child. Consequently the sister "threw a fit" in the office. He seemed very frustrated as he continued to describe the aunt of the child and wondered how she drove to pick up the student without a driver's license,

which would have served as identification. He excused himself and returned to his office. I was amazed with how much I had seen and heard in such a short time while waited.

While I waited I looked around the office and noticed the posted signs stating that student uniforms were required: khaki pants or skirts and blue shirts. On the wall all the TAAS plaques from past years were displayed showing the school's Exemplary status.

In general the school could have been the elementary school I attended as a child. It was built in 1931 and had gone through several additions and renovations. As I entered the building it was very quiet and the floors were clean and shiny. All the appropriate sign-in logs were organized on a shelf in front of the sliding-glass window that looked into the administrative offices. The halls were adorned with commercially made decorations. There was no evidence of student academic work or student artwork. I later found out that art class was no longer offered; it was replaced with counseling groups.

Teacher Profiles and Reporting of the Data

Teacher profiles are presented in this section. First, I provide a brief introduction to explain how the researcher–participant relationship began. Second, I describe the teachers, their background, personal information, and their assigned

positions. This information facilitates a broader perspective of each teacher to the reader. Finally, as I analyzed the data, I identified common themes across all participants, and I have organized the data accordingly.

The principal, Margaret Mason, had arranged for all 4 teacher participants to meet with me as a group so that I could explain my study and confirm their participation. We met in a small conference room located inside the office area. The atmosphere was relaxed and we made small talk as we waited for all the participants to arrive. We spent about an hour talking about teaching and education in general. I shared my background as a former teacher and principal, and they shared their various experiences. We arranged interview and observation times and confirmed that the following Monday I would return to begin my interviews. The principal was present the entire time.

Margaret, a White woman in her mid-40s, has been the principal at Fordham Elementary school for 10 years. She is a native of the city and received all her education locally. We had several prior communications by phone and through e-mail, and she shared with me that she was also working on her dissertation. This may have attributed to her willingness to open up the school to me. I was able to talk to teachers and staff at their convenience. I felt welcomed and comfortable enough to come and go on campus as I wished. As a former principal I knew how important is

was to respect all campus and district policies, and I was conscientious of the teachers' time and responsibilities.

Velma

"My calling is here with these kids, not because I am White, but because I think God meant for me to make a difference. I think the difference I make is biggest here."

Velma grew up in a Minnesota farming community. "Until fourth grade I didn't know anybody wasn't White." Her knowledge about people of color or other ethnicities was limited to her experience about the neighbors who lived down the road from her that adopted Korean twins. "That was my first taste of someone who wasn't just like me." She stated she was very "intrigued" by that. When she was 15 she came to Texas with her mom and sister. Her sister was interviewing for nursing positions. According to her, she "fell in love with the culture, the different mix of people." She made plans to leave Minnesota and join her sister as soon as she graduated. Velma submitted applications in several school districts and finally received an offer to teach first grade from Woodridge Independent School District. Her lifelong dream was to be a first-grade teacher. She accepted immediately "because all my life I was going to be a first-grade teacher and that's all there was to it—that was my sign from God."

When Velma enrolled in college she knew she wanted to be a teacher, and she also knew she wanted to teach in Texas because of the different cultures and the

diversity. I asked Velma about the preparation program at her university. Specifically, I wanted to know if she had taken courses in diversity and multicultural education, since she knew she would be teaching children from diverse backgrounds in Texas. She replied no and almost instinctively added, "As a naïve little farm girl I just figured kids were kids and it would be the same wherever I went." However, in our later interviews she mentioned several times, "I didn't know what I was stepping into."

After a year on the job, Velma returned to Minnesota to get married. She came back to Texas 2 years later. She returned to teach at Fordham Elementary and reluctantly accepted a fifth-grade teaching position, the only position available. She was "scared to death….Yeah, I walked in that first day and I just let them know that no matter how bad they thought they were, I'm badder." She has been teaching fifth grade at Fordham since 1996. Velma talked about the attitudes and behaviors of the fifth-grade students. She believes that the students who have been retained give her the most stress. She has retained several children in the past.

Velma's principal nominated her as a successful teacher of Mexican American students. She views Velma as highly successful with at-risk students because she has a "special place in her heart for students who need a little extra, especially in terms of emotional support." Her principal also sees her as a successful teacher because she takes pride in her students' accomplishments, "as if they were her own." The principal stated that each year a student, most likely a Hispanic boy, is placed in

Velma's class because his "chances of success in other classes is small." She believes that students come to love Velma and truly strive to perform academically for her.

A grade-level colleague confirmed the principal's opinions about Velma. He reiterated the teacher's concern for the child who needs extra help. He continued to reinforce the principal's perceptions, but his final comment about Velma as I was literally on my way out was, "She needs them more than they need her."

Velma attributed her success with students to her openness, honesty, and the love she shows them.

> I'm real. I'm a person just like they are, and I let them know that it doesn't matter what our background is, we are all just people. And some of their experiences I've had, and some of my experiences I can make relevant to them, and I think it's just the relationship. I let them know that I love them. I let them know that I have expectations and that you are not going to just walk over me, but I'm going to love you no matter what you do. I just, they know that I'm real, and they know that I'm not just somebody standing in front of them feeding them information because they are going to have a TAKS test and I want to look good.

Velma described herself as a loving professional, and she believes that her openness creates an environment of trust so that her students feel safe in her classroom. She reported that the main reason for her success is her special ability of openness. She said her students know that they can come to her with most problems. "You know, I think my openness with them and my relationship, my rapport with them on a lot of levels…it's more personal." She asserted that her lived experiences have shaped her own way of dealing with the adversities of life. Velma is sure that

having had negatives in her life has made her a stronger person. She does not hesitate and takes every opportunity to share her life journey and self-disclose with her students. Velma believes that the most important things to teach students are respect, goal setting and persistence.

Velma's classroom is a working classroom and somewhat in disarray. She groups the desks together, not so much for the purpose of working in groups, but because there is not enough space to place them side by side. Stacks of daily discipline folders and workbooks cover the back table.

Velma jokes freely with the students, sometimes using a feigned accent. However, she identified herself as a no-nonsense teacher. She often uses extrinsic rewards to obtain answers from her students. She has high expectations for her students and is not afraid to "lay it on the line. I tell them this work is crap!"

She acknowledged that she had bad experiences in her life and that she shares some of those negative experiences with her students. "I say, you know, I didn't curl up in a ball and roll over and play dead, you shouldn't either." Though she shares her hardships growing up, she believes that her students have had and continue to have worse experiences.

> You know I never got woken up by gunfire. I never went to visit a parent in jail. I try to be supportive and encouraging and firm and strict all at the same time. I give them the tough love kind of parenting angle, and most of the time I think it works well.

It takes great skill to balance and mix these kinds of dynamics in a student–teacher relationship that perpetuates respect, honesty, and trust.

Perceptions of Culture

Velma's primary reason for her decision to come to Texas was her love of the culture and the "different mix of people." Velma's aspiration to work with minority children, particularly Mexican American students, was obviously a very decent and noble motive. This led me to ask the following question: How does culture and the distinct cultural differences between you and your students impact the way you teach? Velma paused thoughtfully before responding, "You know that's funny because when she [principal] presented me with your study [proposal] I thought, I just teach kids. I don't look at them as one specific way, they are just kids to me." Her response was not clear to me, and I continued to pursue the culture question. Velma tried to elaborate, saying, "We are products of our culture, you know, food, atmosphere, and the celebrations, and in some cases religion." She seemed to imply that she has learned more about the Mexican American culture because her brother-in-law is Hispanic. For instance, he provided her a list of Spanish words to listen for, and if the students said anything on the list, she should send them to the office.

> Yeah, uh, I have to learn to read the other children's reactions when some of my students talk in Spanish. And that part, I had 2 years of high school Spanish but that's different. That's not what they speak here. So I have to learn to read the other students' reactions to know if they just said something

> inappropriate, and then I have to bluff. I have to bluff a lot, you know, "Watch your mouth. Don't you say that to me." Sometimes some of the kids, they think you don't know anything, you're White.

When I asked her to define her culture in comparison to the culture of her students, the only thing she could say was, "Well, I like to think of us as an American culture more than anything. I'm very patriotic." In contrast, when she attempted to talk about the culture of her students, she talked about the sour powder candy the students like to eat. She also expresses how much she admires the family closeness with extended family members. "Most of these children, their parents are still in contact with cousins and uncles, and sometimes they live in the same house, that's kind of neat. It's a family raising a child and not just a parent." While this is certainly a positive perception of family support, Velma also explained,

> On an educational level, they need parents who are going to be right next to them and involved. I know some of my students, I have a little girl right now who is, she is heartbroken almost every morning when she comes in because Mom works nights and Grandma can't help with the homework.

It was my intention, through my probing questions about culture, to transition to a more critical in depth discussion about Whiteness. My benign covert attempt was futile, so I decided to confront the issue openly. I candidly asked Velma what she thought about the construct of Whiteness.

> I'm not White and they are not Hispanic, they are just people. I try to relate to them. I try to make them relate to me. I try to make them see beyond the cultural aspect for them. I try to understand their culture and their background, what they are coming from, so that I can reach them a little bit better. We have to look beyond the culture.

Velma claimed not to see color: "I don't really see color, I just see children. I don't understand data. I understand that it needs to be looked at, but I just teach kids, Black, White, Purple, Brown, Green, I just teach kids." Upon hearing this, I thought about a statement often used in race discourse: "I don't really see color." This, according to King (1991) and quoted in research by Ladson-Billings (1994), is just an attempt to justify the inequities by accepting the status quo as inevitable.

Velma's representation of the "other" culture was limited and defined in terms of food and celebration. Velma also views poor and crowded housing conditions and the lack of the English language as cultural problems.

> I don't see them as Hispanic. I know that they are and I understand that and I know the impact that has on them, but I have more of an ownership over them. They are mine regardless of where they came from and what they need.

On the one hand Velma often spoke of her students as individuals with unique characteristics, but on the other hand, when referring to the negative effects of their culture, she lumped the group together, using "they" as if "they" are a homogeneous group. The following statement by Velma illustrates this contradiction:

> You can't say, oh, well, they live in the barrio, and they have 15 people in the house and most of them don't speak English, in spite of that I'm going to do this to reach them. It all falls on the teachers' shoulders. If you want to be a teacher you are not going to look for relevance or cultural aspects. You just have to look at each child as an individual regardless of where they come from or how they come and find a way to teach them.

It is evident that Velma is genuinely interested in learning more about the culture of her students. She takes advantage of campuswide activities that are designed

to celebrate the culture of the children. Unfortunately, the opportunities are limited to a couple of Mexican history events. In September the school celebrates *Diez y Seis de Septiembre—el Dia de la Independencia* (September 16th, Independence Day), and in May the school celebrates *Cinco de Mayo, La Batalla de Puebla* (May 5th, The Battle of Puebla). Velma explained efforts to learn more about Mexican culture and how she involves her students during these special events.

> I've taken the time to learn more about their culture, and we go back to the culture again. I need to know what *Diez y Seis* is about and *Cinco de Mayo*. We talk about it in class, and I'm not the Anglo teacher who hates *Cinco de Mayo* because why are we celebrating it? I take my kids out there, but they have to tell me what it means first. They are going to know why it's celebrated, you have to know who they are and what's important to them. If you are going to reach them, you need to understand their life. With these children it is tacos and refries and cascarones, and boy do I have a good time with those, with my family that comes down here. I love to show them [my family] that side of it.

However, I was at the school during the week of September 16 and did not witness any special celebrations. The only evidence of acknowledgement of Mexican Independence Day that I observed was a bulletin board in the cafeteria.

Velma's perceptions of her students are informed primarily by their ethnicity, culture, and SES. When I asked about her students' characteristics, she asked for clarification. She wanted to know if I meant positive or negative characteristics. I asked her just to share general characteristics about her students, because I did not want to prompt her one way or the other. Velma was not sure if the characteristics she viewed in her students were due to the students' being "Mexican-American or due

to their low economic status." One of the things that she thinks is very positive and admirable is their strong family unity and support. She reflected on her own family support as a child and compared it to her students' situations.

> They are very familial, they are family oriented, more so than where I grew up. They are in constant contact with cousins and uncles and aunts and grandparents, the extended family is more of an inner family. Where I grew up we all got together on holidays. These guys, they spend all of their time with their families, so they are more family oriented.

Velma believes that the family plays a very positive role in the lives of her students. However, in spite of this asset, she believes that the students as a group have had limited experiences. Velma thinks that her students in general have not had adequate life experiences. "They are very limited on the experiences they've had, their background knowledge on different aspects. Their vocabulary is very limited because of that lack of experiences, limited in their English language skills." As if to make a stronger point and what seemed an afterthought, she added, "Many of them could [not] care less, that's not necessarily a good characteristic." I could not decide if she was referring to the children, their parents, or both. Either way, it was a negative generalization.

Although the children may lack "adequate" life experiences, they do not lack of responsibilities, according Velma. "A lot of them have more responsibilities than I ever had as a child. There [are] a lot of responsibilities heaped on some of my students. They are an additional parent in the home." Velma knows her students

assume many adult responsibilities at an early age, but she does not view these experiences as an asset; they are incompatible with her own "White" way of knowing.

Perception of Parents and Their Role

Velma lamented that not many parents are involved in the everyday education of their children. She explained that it was important for the students and that the lack of parental support was demoralizing for teachers.

> I treasure those children who have parents who are always in their face and always making them do their homework because they really care. Teachers that are tired of having to deal with the apathy, the kids caring less and the parents not backing you up. Until you get those families involved, and getting the families involved is a domino effect. If Mom cares about how you are doing, then you are going to start to care about how you are doing. When the family could [not] care less and the child could [not] care less, you can't beat that.

I asked her how she contacted parents to seek and encourage their involvement. She said her main mode of communication was by telephone. She explained that she repeatedly contacted parents on the phone, and it worked a little until they got caller ID. "It's a lot harder now." Many schools have implemented parental involvement plans that require teachers to go into the neighborhood and make home visits. I wondered if Fordham Elementary had a plan, and I asked Velma about her school's plan to connect with the community. Instantly she responded, "No I don't do a lot of home visits." As our conversation about parental involvement continued, I sensed some contradictions about the importance of parental involvement

for Velma. Her commitment to parental involvement was confusing. She had previously expressed her frustration about the apathy on the part of the parents, but she hesitated to try other more creative ways to connect with them other than a phone call. Based on her own experiences as a student, she believes her students do not want her coming to their homes and threatens that she will make a home visit if their parents do not come to meet with her at school.

> I would have just dropped over dead if my teacher had come to my house when I was a child. So part of me hesitates to go there for the sake of the children themselves. I will say, if you don't want me to come to your house, then you better get your parents here. Most of the time that works.

According to Velma, the two main campus-level activities designed to increase parental involvement are the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings and Open House. Attendance at these functions has been better the last couple of years, but it has not been a significant improvement. During the last Open House, only seven parents showed up from Velma's class, and that was better attendance than before. Velma explained that even though attendance at Open House was better this year, it was still not very successful.

> I had two families where both parents were here. I had, the rest were single parents and I'm trying to remember if they were, are single-parent households. A lot of them are that. I know a lot of my parents. One [student] in particular, her mom works all the time. And she hardly ever sees her mom. Mom can't come, she's got to work.

Velma made assumptions that most children in her class come from single-parent households simply because only one parent attended Open House. There may

be several reasons why only one parent was able to attend. Several examples come to mind: (a) Open House meeting time may not be convenient for working parents, (b) both parents hold jobs, (c) work schedules are not regular 8:00–5:00 hours, (d) parents cannot arrange for childcare for other children, and (e) one parent may assume this responsibility. Perhaps Velma's assumption is influenced by her own experiences and expectations.

Velma attributed the increase of parental support to the emphasis and importance of the TAKS. "A couple of years ago TAKS made it very clear that these kids had to pass, and parents had to start realizing that maybe it's not just the schools' responsibility, maybe they needed to be involved a little more."

I wanted to know more about the role of the faculty in addressing the need for more parental involvement. I wanted to know if the teachers had ever met to discuss the lack of parental involvement and strategies to improve parent participation. Velma attempted to explain but was not clear. "I couldn't really tell you. I know we talked about it but not as a main subject. All that will do is get the complainer to complain about how they [parents] are not involved, and that's not productive." She explained that the school added the position of parent facilitator; since this person was hired, more parents come to campus and assist with making copies and bulletin boards. In an interview with the school principal I was told that over 15,000 clock hours of parent volunteer time were recorded, but Velma explained that those hours were duplicated

and that it was the same parents over and over again. The parent facilitator offers classes to the parents, and all the parents have to do is attend. “There’s no heavy recruiting or anything.” The schedule of school meetings is not friendly to working parents. Velma agreed,

> It was very difficult for working parents to adhere to the school’s schedule of meetings. Yeah, they can’t. It falls back on the teacher on whether or not you are going to get your parents involved or not. Sometimes it’s just easier to not.

To Velma the ideal caring parent has the following attributes:

> I want them to annoy me. Constantly asking questions, messages to call home, “How is my son doing?” “Can I have extra homework, she has a B. How can she make it an A?” Just, they are very involved. They want to know every aspect of how their child is doing. They come in, they look and see what their desk looks like. They are looking for extra work. It’s, to the child they are completely smothered and it’s the worst parent in the world. But someday they are going to be thankful for that. The parents that beat on your doors, as annoying as they can be, you wish more of your students had that.

Velma is not pleased with the level of involvement from her parents. She continued to bemoan the lack of support. She made some sweeping generalizations when she compared the level or lack of parental support between Mexican American and White parents.

> They [Mexican American parents] are busy working and not at home to support the children as much as the White children. I hate to say it, but a lot of the White children seem to have a better support system at home. And so when you are reaching Mexican American students, minority students, you have to understand that a lot of these kids don’t have a strong support system at home, and you need to provide it for them. That would be, I think the number-one teaching strategy for Mexican American children. A lot of my Mexican American students are either from single-parent households or households where one parent works and the other doesn’t speak English or

> doesn't have an education above the sixth-grade level and so they don't have the support at home. You can't look at them through rose-colored glasses, because there are no roses there to look at.
>
> So they need parental support or support from some role model or parental figure in their life that's going to help them remember to be accountable for school. I think too many of these children see, don't see that there is a whole world outside of their neighborhood. A few years ago, I had a student who had never, only been to Corpus Christi once, she had never been anywhere outside of Santa Ana or even her neighborhood for that fact. When she went to Corpus Christi she was laying down on the bed of a pickup truck. So she didn't see anything. She was laying down in the bed of a pickup truck all the way to Corpus. I would love to put them on a bus and just drive them around.

It is interesting to note that though Velma professed the need for more parental involvement, she also bemoaned how her fellow teachers in the "White" school districts have to "contend" with parents who often question them about what and why they do certain things in the classroom. She said one of her friends left to teach in a neighboring school district that is primarily White. According to Velma, her friend "had, the teaching strategies that she used with her kids here, a lot of the parents there would say, what are you doing?" Her friend was not used to having parents question her about her teaching. Velma believed the White parents in her friend's school district were more involved, but she seemed frustrated because she felt her friend's expertise was being questioned.

> The parents in [the predominantly White district], when she [friend] first went over, they were kind of taken aback where, and I don't get it because here's a teacher who obviously cares about how your child is doing, and you are going to question her why?

Velma explained why she thought it was so different. The main difference was the focus of the teachers. In her friend's school the teachers had to answer to the parents because the parents were at school often to advocate and demand the best for their children. Velma shared that at her friend's school,

> There is not tutoring because the kids have to ride the bus home and where the kids are involved in athletics, and there is just so many different priorities because the parents are involved. Over there you have parents to contend with and sports to contend with and extracurricular activities to contend with.

In contrast, the parents at Velma's school are less involved and intrusive. Their absence from school may mean that they trust school to take care of their children, they are too busy at work, or they may not care. Velma does not have to "contend" with the parents. Her students and her parents are different. "These kids, the parental involvement is so minimal that I have students to contend with. Here it's school and it's me, for most of them it's me." On the one hand, Velma longs for her parents to be more involved, but on the other she is ambivalent about the degree and type of parental involvement that may result if the parents become actively involved.

Expectations and Success

To learn about Velma's views about students she would consider successful I asked the question directly: Describe what a successful student means to you. Velma's definitions of a successful student follow:

- To me a successful student is not somebody who is driving a Hummer, certainly not made by illegal means . . .
- Somebody who is proud of what they've done, has gone through schooling as far as they possibly could, whether it be just through high school . . .
- My one student I spoke of earlier today that had always failed, he is probably beyond, he's 18 and he's probably still a Junior, if he's a Junior this year. He struggles with school. It's never going to be easy for him. He may never graduate, but he is still trying. That to me is a successful student.
- Some of them just don't have the developmental ability to do certain things, to go beyond certain steps. So a successful student is persevering and determined to be successful at whatever they choose.
- If you are going to work at McDonalds, do it right. That to me is a successful student.
- I'm thrilled with the ones that go on to college. If they were college material, I hope they went to college. If they went to a community college, I hope they did that, if that was more their type.
- If they joined the military, hallelujah. I think all kids should go through the military just to learn that self-discipline aspect and respect for their country.

I was not surprised with some of these responses. Velma described as successful the resilient student who is persistent, determined, and goes to college. Nonetheless, I was perplexed with some of the other definitions simply because, as parent, I would not accept those expectations for my own children. She thinks that children who end up working at McDonald's are successful as long they tried their best. She also thinks it would be great if they joined their military to "learn that self-discipline aspect and respect for their country."

Effects of Standardized Testing

Success or failure is primarily measured by how well the students do on the TAKS exam. This is true for teachers, too. Velma was nominated for this study by her principal as a successful teacher because a high number of her students pass the state exam.

Velma expressed concerns over the excessive emphasis on testing. She believes that testing can be both good and bad for students and teachers. "So much is riding on the TAKS and the students could wake up on an off day and not perform well, TAKS scores don't show how hard teachers and students work." Students and teachers feel tremendous pressure. She described the test as painful and stressful and believes it has taken the fun out of school. She also recognized its benefits but not without trepidation.

> I like TAKS because it forces us to teach at a higher level, and I think kids were getting shortchanged in education prior to it. But on the other hand, I look at students like that and I say, you know, reading is hard for him. It is very difficult for him, and the reading TAKS is so high level and not so much that, as it is the stamina. You can teach them a strategy and they can ace it on one or two or three passages, but they are taking six or seven. And by the time they get through to the middle, they are tuckered out.

The pressure to make sure her students succeed on the TAKS not only creates emotional anxiety, but also physiological concerns.

> I hate the physical illness from [TAKS] that sometimes I feel if I get a bad vibe on my students, and I don't think the day is going well. I get physically ill because I get so intensely into it. It's a big rush for me. I want them to do really well because I know how hard we work. It's good and it's bad.

In spite of all this pressure, she finds ways to cope and stays focused on the challenges imposed on her and on her students by the state accountability system. She is determined to help her students do well on the exam.

> I don't let it inhibit me. I don't let it because I'm a teacher and I'm going to find a way to make whatever subject it is, language arts or social studies, benefit my students in TAKS by making sure that the way that I'm instructing them in that subject is going to be something that they can incorporate into their TAKS skills. TAKS keeps me more focused.

She hesitantly acknowledged that she would like to include many other things in her lessons that are not measured by the TAKS, but she does not do it most of the time. "There's a lot of stuff I would love to be able to do, but it's not necessarily important. Not because it's not tested on TAKS, but because it's not really in our text."

Although she tries to deal with the pressure of the TAKS the best way she can, she has not been totally immune from the stressful effects of high-stakes testing.

> I cried last year. I sat in the principal's office and we cried together because I've always had good scores. I had 100% passing math for 6 or 7 years….I know I taught last year. I wasn't disappointed in the math because I knew some of my kids came to me and the higher level of thinking required on TAKS I knew that there were going to be some that probably were not going to make it. There were four. That bothers me anytime I have to tell one of my students that they failed. But what really bothered me was science. I had like a 60% passing rate in science and that mortifies me. The year before I had the best passing rate in the district.

Velma sets high goals for herself and for her students. She tries her best and expects all her students to pass, but last year's scores were disappointing to her. She

expressed concern that her passing rates are gradually decreasing and seemed to be looking for an explanation. She said the passing or failure rates reflect her level of competence.

> I expect that I taught 100% and they should be able to get 80% or 90% of it, right? Last year less of my students passed, which completely disheartened me, because as a teacher you are your numbers and…I was a 60% teacher. No. I was a 100% teacher.

She was hard on herself, but she could not accept that she was only a "60%" teacher. In her analysis, she identified some potential reasons for the lower scores. She was not making excuses but was trying instinctively to find a way to rationalize the lower passing rates.

> For some reason we didn't get the low kids [to pass]. When I looked…when we looked at our kids that passed the test last year, they passed at 80% and 90%. So the ones that failed were the ones that were low to begin with, and we just didn't make up enough ground from the previous year or the previous years….That really disheartened me. Going from the best passing scores in the district to average bothered me.

It seemed that Velma was having a difficult time trying to deal with the reality of the lower passing rates. She suddenly changed the focus of our discussion to another concern about her students. Velma resents that her students do not continue to do well when they go to the middle school and high school.

According to Velma, students leave Fordham Elementary prepared and successful. The data indicate that is not the case at the middle and high schools. Mexican American students are dropping out, failing, and not attending college or

universities. So the standardized test that is used as the measure of success for both student and teacher does not continue when the students leave Fordham. When I asked Velma to speak to this she again linked the problem to parents.

> The teachers have learned to focus in on that data. Those teachers have zeroed in on where their kids needs are. I put a lot of it on the families and the teachers. Teachers that are tired of having to deal with the apathy, the kids caring less and the parents not backing you up. Until you get those families involved.

As I prepared to bring closure to our interview, Velma sighed as if to give herself time to reflect carefully on her final thoughts. "Some of them are going to get lost. I know. Hopefully something at some point that I have said will help them make a right choice. I don't know, public school, the system is broken."

Summary

Velma maintained that she relates to her students because she, too, had a difficult childhood. She shares some of her experiences with her students so that they know she did not succumb to the hardships that came her way. Velma does not see her students as Mexican American; she only sees children and claims to "just teach kids." Nevertheless, Velma said that many of the problems her students have are due to their culture and economic status.

Pamela

> *"I think we will find out that we don't have to worry about the expectations of different cultures. You just do it because that's the right thing to do, and that's what we teach at our school, the right thing to do."*

Pamela is the music teacher at Fordham Elementary. She has been teaching for more than 15 years, 12 of those years at Fordham. Pamela also teaches summer school every year. She told me that she sometimes thinks of going back into the regular classroom, but teaching summer school convinces her to continue being a music teacher.

Pamela and I quickly learned that we are both from the state of Washington and that we attended the same university. That is how we started our conversation; by sharing our experiences in Washington state.

Pamela quit teaching when her first child was born, and when her last child entered kindergarten she decided to go back to teaching.

> My husband at that time was a music teacher. He taught band. He decided he was going to go back into the military, so then we started moving around with the military. I didn't really get a teaching job until we moved here. I was working with government service at that time. Then we came back here in 1993.

I asked Pamela why she went into the teaching profession. She paused and reflected for a minute, hesitating then explaining that she used to play school all the time when she was young. She paused again and added that teaching was what she wanted to do from the beginning of college.

> I'm a singer. I liked being a singer and I just thought it would be a lot of fun. I went in from the very beginning and said, I'm going to be a music teacher. I feel kind of badly now because I wish I would have tried other things too.

Ms. Martin, the principal, nominated Pamela as a successful White teacher of Mexican American students because of her "respect and appreciation of each child's unique culture, although it may be very different from her own." Throughout our weeks of formal interviews and informal conversation, Pamela constantly talked about her respect for the students. Quite often she explained that she does not self-disclose to her students for the fear of making "them feel bad." Pamela shared with me that some of her students overheard her speaking to the librarian about her swimming pool and "their eyes got really big." She does not mix her home life with school. She believes that it is important not to share her lifestyle with her students because it so different from their way of life.

Most of Pamela's students are Mexican American. I asked her to tell me about her experiences with minority students and about her own culture. She shared the following:

> The neighborhood that I grew up in was White. That was during the time when they were starting the busing and stuff too. I've always taught just predominantly White, very few Hispanics. This is the first time that I've ever really been around the Hispanic people, besides when we lived in Chicago there was quite a big area that had Hispanics there, but they didn't go to school with my kids either.

Pamela is concerned that her personal life experiences and material gains will somehow make the children feel deprived; therefore, she hesitates to share her life

experiences with her students. She expressed that personal relationships are very important, but sharing life experiences is only one way, only from student to teacher.

> This is my first [experience with Mexican Americans], and I did have to make a few adjustments when I came here, because the children don't seem to learn as quickly as somebody that's been out more and gone on a lot of vacations and had a lot of experiences besides just living in the neighborhood. I'm very careful about not saying things about when I'm going on a trip or something like that. I suppose I could share with them, but I really don't because they don't do that; I think maybe it would make them feel they can't go places that I go. So I just avoid doing those things. Every so often somebody will say, "Do you live in a two-story house?" And I will say, "Yes, I do."

Pamela is really sensitive to the difference in lifestyle between her and her students. She provided yet another example of an incident that happened her first year at Fordham.

> The first year I was here and I came back from Christmas and I said, "Okay, let's just go down and everybody tell me one thing that you got for Christmas." A lot of the kids didn't get anything. So I never did that again.

This experience early in her interaction with Mexican American students has affected the way she builds relationships with her students. She continues to be very careful about sharing too much personal information related to the way she lives.

> I don't want to have them think that I think that I'm better than they are. I think that does happen if you wear too much jewelry or you talk about places that you go. I just don't do that.

The principal expressed great admiration for Pamela. She was impressed because Pamela is the only music teacher in the school, and though she does not speak Spanish, she is responsible for teaching all the bilingual classes. I wondered how she

negotiated instruction for non-English speakers. I asked Pamela if she had taken any courses or workshops to help her with English as a Second Language (ESL) strategies. She replied no: “I respect them and they respect me.” This seemed to be her standard response when confronted with the issue of language.

Though teaching monolingual Spanish-speaking students must be difficult for both the students and teacher, Ms. Martin explained that Pamela has overcome the barrier “by using music and dance to reach all the children.” Pamela had a different explanation.

> I don’t speak Spanish. I do sing some Spanish songs because I can do that. But I don’t speak Spanish, so the kids in my room are more immersed into the English, and they use my time, I know, as English time that they have to do for the school.

I was interested in learning about the school’s philosophy about bilingual education. I wanted to know if the district and campus believed in language maintenance and if they provided children with bilingual assistance and role models. I questioned Pamela about the students’ competency in Spanish.

> They keep them pretty well fluent if they are in the bilingual class, fluent in both, they can do English and I will say to them, they will start talking in Spanish and I will say, “I don’t speak Spanish.” Then they will speak to me in English. They will pick the Spanish language first.

It was not clear from Pamela’s response and from my observations in general if there was a common vision and philosophy about bilingual education at Fordham Elementary. Children are expected to transition to English as early as possible at the

risk of losing their language. One thing seemed obvious: The teachers prefer for most of their students to take the TAKS in English by the time they get to third grade.

The principal thought highly of Pamela and believed she was a successful teacher. I wanted to know if Pamela thought she was a successful teacher of Mexican Americans and why. She described herself as successful because she sets high expectations for her students. Pamela reiterated that she respects the students and they respect her. She is proud of the support she gives her students.

> The way that they are, a lot of them, they don't get the hugs, and so I give them things like that. I listen to them. A lot of them are from very large families so they don't get the one-on-one, and I believe that I provide that for them so that I can help them if they have some problems and will listen to them.

I met Pamela in her classroom during her lunchtime. Her classroom was typical of elementary music rooms. Risers were lined with chairs and keyboards without plugs were set up in the corner. With each new class she stood at the door and greeted the students. I remember every class I observed starting out with "The Star Spangled Banner," and even the monolingual Spanish-speaking children with their hands over their hearts attempted or pretended to sing. The students then moved on to math, singing multiplication facts and ordinal numbers.

> I do math problems with them. If there is something in a song or when we're going through and I say, "Well, this person was born this year and they died this year, how old were they when they died?" I'll make problems with it and then we talk, we also talk and read all of the songs so they get the reading too.

The students seemed exceptionally well behaved and compliant. However, during this observation it was apparent that several students did not understand the words or the concept of the lesson.

Perceptions of Culture

During our lunchtime meetings Pamela often talked about respect for her students and how she valued their family unity and ties. She seemed pleased that the students invite her to family celebrations. Pamela said that she attends different parties that are held at churches or parks but does not go to their homes. She mentioned that the parties were too large to be held in their homes. She also explained the way she defines culture:

> Culture is the way that you are raised and the type of celebrations that you have, and so I always think of culture as their heritage, what they are doing, what their beliefs are, and try to fit in with that.

Pamela's culture is different from her students' culture, and yet she feels successful primarily due to the respect. I asked Pamela if there was anything else that she learned over the years that helped her define her success with Mexican American students.

> That's a hard question. I think mostly mine is just out of respect, it really is. I think that's what makes me successful . . . is that I try and fit in when I'm here. I try and fit into what we do at this school and what they do, having their celebrations and enjoy their family celebrations with some of them. They will invite me to do things, and I always do that. I never, I will say that I really don't talk much about the things that I do. I just more enjoy the things that

> they do because I think, well, there is a big difference between my life and their life.

Pamela said that the extended family support is very positive and promotes family togetherness. She commented on how this is different than White, middle-class families and related it to cultural differences.

> I think it's very exciting. I really do. They help each other a lot, and I think that's really exciting. I wouldn't do that, but again that goes along with culture. I think they do things more with family than we do. You know, we tend to, if there's a vacation, go off someplace and do our vacationing with our little family that we have, where they would party with their whole family, their whole extended family. I think that's so fun because there are a lot of people here that are related to each other. They help each other a lot.

Though Pamela stated she thinks it is "exciting" that the extended family helps each other, she went on to discuss what seemed like a contradiction. She explained how the second- and third-generation students are not doing well.

> I think it just is what it is. I don't think it's going to change. You know they told you I'm seeing the kids now. I'm getting my students, kids, they are not being successful either. I've been here so long I know the families really well and so I can ask about the brothers and sisters or the mothers and grandparents too. . . . They come back and they visit me all the time and bring their babies back, and I am teaching some of their babies now.

According to the other participants, parents are not very involved. Their attendance at teacher conferences and required school meetings is significantly low. I asked Pamela again about her perception regarding the lack of parental involvement. She quickly responded with her interpretation: "I guess they are afraid of hearing bad

news. They don't want to hear that their child is not doing well." When I asked her if she was sure this was an accurate assumption she responded,

> Yeah, we have, if you call a parent, if they have caller ID, which most people do now, if it says "Woodburn ISD," they don't answer the phone because they are afraid they will have to do something about their child.

Perceptions of Parents and Their Role

Pamela believes that the extended family and close-knit relationships are a positive aspect of the Mexican American culture. She also thinks that lack of parent support and encouragement are lacking and that the teacher is responsible for "doing it all."

> I think they are getting a lot of encouragement from us, but I'm not so sure that they are getting the encouragement from the family. I've always thought that, again, this is my thinking, that the children are not encouraged at home because their parents didn't do well and I think there is a little bit of fear….I think, go back to parents again, they've got to be sure they get their work done. If they don't get their work done, they are going to fall behind, fall behind and that's how come they drop out of school. They are so far behind already, why even try anymore? I think after they leave here there has to be more parent help when they go on; make sure they have the work done, make sure they are doing it. That's the only way it's going to get done. That's where the breakdown is, right there, I think, the parenting.

Pamela explained that parents avoid coming to school when they anticipate that they will have to discuss their child's poor performance. However, she also explained that though Open House never has had a large parent turnout, the student performances and special events are always well attended.

> We have a big *Cinco de Mayo* parade here that we do, that's our biggest thing that we really do here is that we have a big *Cinco de Mayo* parade. They have performances. You know the kids dress up, they make floats . . . that's what we do, it's wonderful, it's absolutely wonderful. The parents will come and show up and we set chairs up for . . . a lot of participation. I think it's very important to get the parents involved so, you know, the children are just so excited because they are in the programs that they will come. There is a problem, and one of the problems is that if the parents don't bring the children, the children don't get to be in it. I have found that's a problem in this area that I have not had before. It also is a problem because some of them don't have cars so they don't have the transportation a lot of times they can't get here. . . . We do it during the day for the rest of the kids so they do get an opportunity to do it. . . . Some are afraid to go out at night too because of the area.

Pamela acknowledges and accepts that many parents have legitimate reasons for their absence from school meetings and functions. She is aware that parents are reluctant to come to school to hear bad news about their children.

According to Pamela, Mexican American families "help each other a lot," so I asked her again about how they provide academic support at home.

> I don't think that they feel that they need to help the children that much, that when they come to school that's where they learn, but when they go home they don't work with them like past schools that I've been in that are not the Hispanic ones [schools].

Pamela further explained why she believes Mexican American children do not get enough support from their parents.

> When the kids come to school, most of them don't know their colors, their numbers, the alphabet. That's something that I think that other cultures work on much more than they do, and there isn't the support, plus we have a big dropout rate too. I think that sometimes they don't help because they feel that they can't do it. I think they can, but they feel that they can't help, so they

> don't. A lot of people around here, the adults, they don't speak English or write English, and that's hard on the children.

We talked a lot about parents and their lack of caring. As the conversation progressed I asked Pamela to describe the attributes of a caring parent.

> The children have clean clothes. They may not have new clothes, but they need to have clean clothes. They take care of the children. If the child that comes in every day with their homework done everyday with their reading logs done, you know it's because the parents have taken the time. . . . So the parent that gets the child there on time and makes sure the homework is done, makes sure they are clean, that's the parent that I would say would make a success of their child. I think it's, sometimes I think they [parents] just don't think they can better their selves, what are they going to do? It's hard for them. They don't have enough money. They don't have the things that they would like to have. My feeling is that they are burdened a lot. And, you know, their sons or daughters do come home with babies, and that's a burden. One time this mother was so happy when she found out her daughter was pregnant. I was just shocked.

I asked Pamela to expand on the schooling experience of the Mexican American student at Fordham and how it differs from Anglo children in other schools.

> They appreciate doing things. They appreciate you talking to them. They appreciate you hugging them, because they don't get all those things all the time. I think probably somebody from Angle Hills, they are used to that. It's just something else. . . . I worry about them, so I know they are nice and safe when they are in the school. I know they are going to get all the meals. I know as soon as they reach out to me to get a hug, they've got that hug right back. Sometimes I think this is a wonderful place for them to be. I'm sure at the beginning I talked to you about how I worry about them. . . . I worry about them so I know they are nice and safe when they are in the school.

Pamela perceived her students as "needy," when she compared her students at Fordham with the more affluent students. She enjoys working with her students and is proud of how she helps them because they appreciate even the small gestures.

> They [students from Angle Hills] aren't as needy as our children are. One time I watched a boy every day come in and he had shoes on and never had socks on. I bought a package of socks and gave it to his teacher and said, you know, don't say who it was from. But you notice things like that more when you teach in a school like this than you would in another school. It was really fun to watch him wear the socks. It was wintertime too. They would appreciate something like that, something as small as a pair of socks.

From the beginning of my study there was a constant of conversation about how well Fordham Elementary prepares the students to succeed. Several teachers expressed that the students at Fordham are successful.

> I think that they are really prepared when we let them go [to middle school], but I think that they aren't coddled as much as we do here. We want them to do their work, and then if they don't we give them another chance. And so by the time their report cards come out they have made up all their work.

Pamela's principal said she does a "beautiful job of incorporating reading into the music curriculum as well as incorporating aspects of various cultures." The principal reiterated that she is pleased with Pamela's ability to integrate the TAKS objectives into music. Every time I observed Pamela's music class she was doing something revolving around reading and mathematics.

Pamela, like the classroom teachers, must tutor students on TAKS objectives after school. The after-school tutorials do not include music. She tutors 14-16 students for 45 minutes after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The instructional specialist and the principal assess the practice tests and identify specific TAKS objectives for Pamela to work on with the students. I asked her if the students were

released from tutorials once they mastered the objectives. Pamela explained that all students were required to continue up until the day before the test.

I asked Pamela if she thought that TAKS was an appropriate measure for the students and the exam revealed their strengths accurately.

> They know what to do. I think it's a very good test. If you knew everything that was on the TAKS test, you would be very smart. But if we start having them have failures in elementary, they are just going to think, "Well, I'm going to be a failure when I get in middle school."

Expectations and Success

Pamela said,

> We don't make excuses because our population is 99% Hispanic. We don't make excuses for that. I expect them to follow the rules. I expect them to do the curriculum. I expect them to sing. I expect them to read whatever it is we are supposed to do, and they come up to my expectations.

I specifically asked Pamela to describe one of her students that she believed to be highly successful. I asked her to name and describe some of his or her attributes. She proceeded to portray the following student:

> He went off to college. While he was here he was just an exemplary student. His mother started a Boy Scout troop here, and he is working on his Eagle Scout right now. I attribute a lot to his parents. They didn't go to college and they just do the same things that I do, you can do this. You just find a way. He went on a basketball scholarship to a private college. I'm just so proud of him, and you know, he's grown up the same way as the rest of the children have. He's just really done special things and through the Boy Scout troop that he was in, he did a lot of volunteer work, and I think that made him really grow a lot, and it really showed in everything that he did.

I inquired about service learning or community projects at Fordham. I thought that if these types of programs helped students to be successful, then there may be an opportunity for other students. Pamela said that there were no enrichment or service projects in place since the former librarian had retired. Apparently the librarian was the one who took an interest in those kinds of activities for students. Pamela continued to talk about students who were doing well.

> I have several students that have done very well. It seems like most of them are the boys that are shining more than the girls, and I'm not too sure why that is. They've gone on to do sports. I think that it's getting the children involved in things like extra activities.

Her reference to the boys' doing better than the girls was interesting and in contradiction to one of her colleagues. The day before I had interviewed a fifth-grade teacher who suggested that the girls were more successful than the boys because of all the responsibilities they have at home such as cooking, cleaning, and babysitting. He continued, "The boys just don't have good role models, they model themselves after their laid-back, blue-color worker fathers."

Several teachers I spoke with commented that when students leave Fordham Elementary they are well prepared for middle school. Pamela agrees with her colleagues and expressed concern about the student's poor achievement during their middle school years.

> I think it goes back to . . . can they [parents] help the kids in middle school? No, they can't. If you think about the way education has changed and the classes that they have to take now just to finish up, those parents have not

> taken those classes. So they can't help, and because they can't help, things don't get done, and kids start falling back, too, because they are not going to get help from the teachers in the middle school. I don't know how it's going to change. I don't think it is. I think that's why we have such a big dropout rate.

Although Pamela believes that part of the reason students do poorly in middle school is because the parents are incapable of helping their children, she also blames their teachers. She seems to resent the fact that teachers at Fordham work very hard to prepare students and then teachers at the middle school fail to continue the growth. Nonetheless, she also noted that an increasing number of students are doing well.

> After the teachers, after we keep pushing them [the students], then they go on to middle school and on to high school . . . and there are more of them now going on. They will come back and they are going to the junior colleges. I'm absolutely thrilled when they do that, just absolutely thrilled.

Our discussion about student performance at the middle school shifted when I asked Pamela about the achievement gap between the Mexican American students and their Anglo counterparts. Her response was similar to those of the other participants.

> I look out and I see students, I don't see Mexican Americans. I don't, I think that what we're doing, especially in our school, I really believe that we never dumb down anything. We always bring them up, and we have high expectations. It may take longer for those things to happen, but I don't, I'm really happy that I'm in this school because I don't make excuses for them at all.

In her role as teacher Pamela believes that the most important things she can teach her students are respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Her constant reference to "respect" seemed to be the bridge she uses to walk over the cultural incompatibility between her and her students.

> Respect is very important. If they don't respect the teachers, their classmates, and respect the work that they need to do, they are not going to succeed. They need to show a lot of respect. Another thing that they need to show is compassion. I think they have to have compassion for their classmates. That's why the boy I was telling you about, he had a lot of compassion and wanted to help. I think that makes a big difference.

Summary

Respect was the main strategy that Pamela referred to when defining her success with Mexican American students: "They respect me and I respect them." She often spoke about how the students appreciated hugs and other things that they did not get from home. Pamela enjoyed being able to provide what she believed to be a safety net while the students were at school. Pamela felt that the parents were burdened with issues such as large families, financial issues, and lack of the English language. She attributed these factors to their inability to help their children be academically successful. Therefore, it was the teachers' responsibility to "do it all" if the children are going to be successful.

Kim

> *"I work really hard. I'm always on them. I never give up on them. I ride them until they can't do it anymore. I make them see that they can be successful. You just keep working at them."*

Kim is a middle-aged woman who grew up in Iowa. After graduation from high school, she left Iowa to attend college in Minnesota. Coincidentally, she attended the

same college in Minnesota as two other participants in this study. I asked Kim how and why she decided to become a teacher. I wanted to know what led her to the teaching profession. She responded immediately almost as if she knew I was going to ask this question.

> I just wanted to work with children. I remember even in junior high I worked in the summer with a Head Start program as a volunteer and I loved it. That's when I worked with the really little kids, the 5-year-olds. I loved it. I had fun. They were great. They were hilarious. I loved it. And trying to help them learn how to write their names, say their letters. And I really enjoyed that. Even then I saw how the parents weren't involved with their children. I was really surprised because I didn't have that problem. My mother and my father were very involved in our education and pushed and pushed and pushed. I was surprised to see that these people, some of them didn't even care. They could [not] have cared less.

Kim explained that the students in the Head Start program were very diverse. The classes included Hispanic, African American, Native American, and White children. She described her life as very different from the lives of the children she worked with in the Head Start program.

After Kim graduated from college she immediately went to Mexico City where she did her student teaching and then taught for the U.S. Department of Defense at the American School Foundation. Kim returned to Iowa after 6 years in Mexico, but she had a difficult time readjusting to life in the United States. She decided to come to Texas because it was close to Mexico. She has been teaching fourth grade at Fordham Elementary since 1991.

Her principal, Ms. Martin, described her as a "very traditional teacher and a strict disciplinarian." The principal views her as successful with the students because she is "all business; she gets things done." According to Ms. Martin, Kim "takes students who have been allowed to flounder before, and she pushes them to high levels, often making more than a year's growth within the year." The principal explained that initially parents often question the placement of their children in her classroom because she holds them accountable for things that they may have been allowed to let slip by before. Ms. Martin stated that Kim is the sort of teacher students remember years later as "the one who made you buckle down and get things done."

Kim' principal thought she was very traditional, but I wanted to know if she agreed. I asked her to self-define the term.

> I'm very traditional. You know how they, what I call the fluff stuff, you know, little activities and little learning centers. No, I'm hardcore, stand up there, teach them, they practice, they go do it, and they are successful. That's how I'm successful . . . my traditional way of teaching.

The principal confirmed Kim's effectiveness using state assessment results. "Kim has always had pretty good TAKS scores, particularly in math and writing." According to Kim, it is a competition between teachers many times inspired by the principal. The competition builds up during the year using benchmark assessment results to motivate the teachers.

> I've tried the fluff stuff and centers and stuff. I tell you, come crunch time I was behind. That's when I taught at another school. We had four teachers in fifth grade and I was Number 4, and I'm never Number 4. I never want to be Number 4. It's embarrassing. And my principal, and she's a good friend of mine, she said, she walked into the lounge and said, after they had gotten the recent scores from a practice test and she said, "Guess who is in fourth place in the fifth grade?" She looks right over at me. I said, "I know it's me." I said, "But this isn't the real test, is it?" I said, "You wait until the scores come in and then we'll talk, but I'm not worried yet."

The stress associated with the pressure to have the best scores was evident. Kim shared that it forced her to change her approach to teaching. It also forced Kim to transfer her own pressure to the students as well.

> I was a wreck. I went in there and I just dropped all that nonsense stuff and went in and did my teaching. I gave up my planning time. I mean, I took a child that I had at another school and he repeated fourth grade, still had never passed. In third grade, fourth grade twice, never passed TAKS, and in fifth grade he passed both parts. I tell you, the day of the test he was in my room at 7:30 and we were still going over the strategies.

Ms. Martin acknowledged that it was Kim's persistence that helped this particular student pass the TAKS. It was her belief in testing and her competitive nature that made the difference for this child. The principal could not say enough about Kim's passing rates on the TAKS.

> This year her scores were exceptionally good, especially in comparison to the overall campus scores. This isn't so amazing in itself, except for the fact that I know what kind of class I gave her this year, and admittedly it was very challenging.

Kim agreed with her principal. She expressed that the unstable family structure of her students further complicates the challenge for students to do better on the assessments.

> I had two parents. These children didn't have two parents. Some of them had one, and even then some of their grandparents had them, even back then, and that was a long, long time ago. I just couldn't believe that these people didn't involve themselves in their children's lives.

Kim had been a teacher in Mexico for 6 years. I was curious about the students she taught in Mexico and how they were different or similar to the students she now teaches. She provided an interesting and stark, yet similar comparison.

> The students were diplomats' children. They were wealthy, extremely wealthy Mexican families. Well, I know when I was in Mexico, those kids were extremely wealthy, they had everything you could possibly want, except their parents didn't pay any attention to them, and they were raised by the maids in the houses. Here the kids have parents, but their parents don't always pay attention to them like they should. It's not all of them; it's just some of them. I understand both sides, the wealthy that didn't and the poor that didn't. I don't know, I just empathize more with them [poor children].

Kim's Mexican students were extremely affluent. In contrast, her Mexican American students are extremely poor. In either case, according to Kim, economic conditions did not seem to matter in regard to parental involvement. To Kim most parents were not very involved with their children like her own parents were involved with her education.

Kim takes the challenge of her job very personally. She is sensitive to the negative media reporting that is always connected to less affluent school districts and

the poor students and their families. According to Kim, it is always the poor school districts that have their names in the paper for low performance. She is tired of listening to people who say, "They can't, they can't," referring to children like her students. Kim's goal is to prove them wrong. These negative presentations and low expectations they perpetuate are a motivating factor to push her students to succeed.

> I keep them after school. I sometimes keep them in during PE [Physical Education]. I know I'm not supposed to. Sometimes I will work in the morning with them. Sometimes I will stay later and work with them. I just keep at them all the time. I always make sure that they are on top of things, and then I call the parents. I talk to the parents. I try to get them involved as much as possible.

Perceptions of Culture

When the conversation turned to the cultural mismatch between White teachers and their Mexican American students, Kim shook her head and said that the only difference between Mexico and the United States was that Mexicans spoke Spanish. She attempted to provide a comparison and told me that recent immigrant Mexican parents manifest more interest in their children.

> Children are important to them, education to them is very important. They put their children before anything. Whereas here in the United States, we don't always put our children first like they do. If they are new arrivals, they are more inclined to put their child first; if they are second generation, they don't. They've lost it. They become like the rest of us—not the rest of us, my child always comes first, but like a lot of other people that, you know, they would rather be doing something else than chasing after and making sure their child does what they need to do.

I wanted to know more about Kim's cultural background and how it was similar or different to her student's Mexican American culture. She provided the following explanation.

> Oh, my dad is first generation. His mother was from Germany. On my mother's side they are English and Irish. The only difference is they have piñatas for birthdays and we didn't. I don't really see a lot of difference. They make tamales at Christmas. We didn't do that, we had oyster stew. I would rather have tamales. Their food and then sometimes they celebrated Three Kings Day and we didn't celebrate Three Kings Day. Just like holidays and food. I can't see much, any other difference.

One of the first signs of assimilation is the loss of one's native language. Since almost 100% of the students at Fordham are Mexican American, I asked Kim if her students were bilingual or monolingual English or Spanish. I wanted to know her thoughts regarding the impact of language on the students' educational success.

> Some of the kids in here can speak both languages, and some can't speak any Spanish at all. They didn't preserve their culture, some of them. I think their parents do, but they just never taught it to their children. I didn't keep any of our culture. I don't have anything, any German things that we do, or Irish, except for St. Patrick's Day when you wear green, but everybody does that.

Kim did not elaborate further because at this point it was time for her to go and pick up her students from PE. Kim believes that language is very much part of her students' culture, but she did not identify this as a difference between her and the students. It is not clear if she thinks it is good or bad that her students lost their native language, but hints that it might not be all that bad because she did not keep her parents' language or many of their traditions and she thinks she has done well.

Perceptions of Parents and Their Role

Kim believes that parental involvement is the key to success for students. In regards to home visits Kim was adamant about not making visits to the parents' homes. She said that she now has a child of her own and does not go into the neighborhood anymore. She is available to meet with parents from 7:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. and said, "That's a wide range of times to come and visit and to talk." She said that if a parent does not answer the telephone calls, "I track the parents down in the parking lot when they are dropping off the child." She shared the following incident as an example.

> I did that with a parent 3 years ago, and every night I went out to the car and said this is what he has for homework to do tonight. And she would make sure he got it done, but if I didn't go out there and tell her, it wouldn't get done. You know, she got to where if I wasn't out there she would call school and say, "You weren't out there today so I don't know what he has for homework." Never mind he was supposed to write it down every day but he just chose to lose that information.

Kim implied that the students' lifestyles are less than desirable and that their families are satisfied with the status quo. She commented on how wonderful it is that new immigrant parents put the children first; she maintained that they lose this quality when they become too assimilated into the mainstream culture. However, she contradicted herself with the following statement.

> Personally they need support from home, because if they don't have support from home, unless they are extremely driven, then it will be difficult for them

> to see beyond what they have here. Some of them are satisfied with what they have. There are a lot of grandparents today that are raising their grandchildren because the parents are incapable of taking care of their own children.

Kim was not sure if students should assimilate or not. According to her if students do not assimilate it means that they are "satisfied with the status quo." On the other hand, if the students assimilate, they risk losing their parent's support.

I changed the focus of the interview and explained to Kim that the data indicate that Anglo students are doing substantially better than their African American and Mexican American counterparts. More of the Anglo students graduate and enter 4-year higher education institutions. She seemed surprised and attempted to explain.

> I don't know where those Anglo children are coming from. I mean, if they are coming from Angle Hills, then yeah, because they are affluent and most of those parents have those big high-paying jobs and their kid is going to have one too. So, you know, they spend a lot of time with their kids. They work with their children. They are in those schools over there all the time because the mothers don't work so they can be up there, too, and not just volunteer, they are up there making sure that their child is doing and is getting what they need to get. I don't know, I guess maybe the parental involvement is more, would make the difference. In here, at this school the Anglo children, there is not very many, they are the same as the Hispanic children.

Kim discussed the African American children separately because they have always done better than her White and Mexican American students. She seemed convinced that they did well because their parents were in the military. She based her judgment on a very limited number (four or five) of African American children.

> African American, they've always done better than everybody. I have not had any African American in this school that has been below, ever. I think I have

> had four or five African American children in my years here. They've always, and even when I was over at Windham Elementary, but they were military children, so that's different too. If they don't do well, you call the commander and the commander takes care of business.

Kim proudly shared a particular incident in detail. She was not concerned with the violation of privacy or she was willing to do whatever was it took to get the parent involved without regard for the consequences.

> This happened to me one time. I could not get the parent, this kid was misbehaving—and he wasn't Black, he was an Anglo—and he was misbehaving and I tried to get the parent to come up there to talk to me. I talked to the mother and the father, the father was in the military, couldn't get him to come, couldn't get him to come. Someone said, call the commander. So I called the commander and I said, "Sir, I'm terribly sorry to bother you, but I can't get so-and-so to come up here and talk to me about their child who is misbehaving in class and not getting his work done." "He will be there in 15 minutes." He found him and that man was there in 15 minutes. That man was "yes ma'am, yes ma'am, yes ma'am." That kid never misbehaved again and did his work.

Kim continued to compare the African American children with the Mexican American children.

> All the African American children I've ever had have always been really good students, and their parents more than Hispanic children's parents push them more, much, much more. They won't tolerate any nonsense or any fooling around or any playing around. You call them and they take care of business.

Kim makes sense of this by inferring that the military is responsible for teaching African American parents to push their children and to have high expectations as well as to respond quickly to the call of authority, the teacher. "They don't want any fooling around, education is important to them."

We shifted the conversation to the differentiation of the curriculum and parental involvement between White schools and minority schools. She asserted that schools on the "other side of town" do not need to focus on the standardized tests and have more time for acceleration. She attributes this to parental involvement and the kids' just "getting it faster."

> The parents are very involved with their [children's] education. They are educated themselves and therefore they put a higher priority on education. They are willing to go however far they have to go to get their child where they need to be, because they know that education is their only way to success.

Kim was not convinced that she had fully answered my question about the achievement gap. According to Kim, she was sure that "these people" (Mexican Americans) seemed to be satisfied and happy about their living conditions and quality of life.

> Whereas these people are happy with the status quo, the majority…they are happy to live right where they live. They don't care if they don't have anything more. I don't understand it because, but it was always engrained into me that you strive for higher. More parents, in the more Anglo neighborhoods, care more about education than people here in this area do. That doesn't mean that everybody in this area does not care about education. There is a small minority, but they don't care. They frankly don't care. You know, part of the reason that I live where I live is because of the school system. When I came to Santa Ana I decided that if I was going to have children I needed to live where the best school system was in the city. So I made up my mind and I did and I'm there.

Kim continued to make comparisons between the rich and poor school districts in an attempt to further explain why she chose to live outside the school district where she works.

> I want my child to start out right. I don't want her to be behind. They don't have the clowns in the classroom. They have, parents there really care about the education. I've visited some of their classrooms and they don't have the problems that we do with inattentiveness, sleeping, you know, it just doesn't exist.

Kim stressed again that the main reason why the children at the rich school district are successful is that parents care about their kids' education. Kim proceeded to share a story about her former principal for whom she had great respect.

> I remember my first principal in Woodburn. He said, "Kim, what would you do if you had to live in this district in order to teach in it?" I said, "I guess I would have to quit." He said, "Yeah, I've asked everybody that's new to Woodburn and they say the same thing."

Some school districts require their superintendent and administrators to live in the school district. Given the principal's question I asked Kim if he lived in the district himself. Kim responded emphatically.

> No, of course not, he lives in Angle Hills. He is retired now. He was a minister at the time. He did that on Sunday. He was hilarious. I loved him. He was a good principal. He was here for 30 years.

The dialogue shifted to the parents again. Kim continued her discussion about "these people," referring to the parents of her students. I did not ask any questions about social welfare programs, social services, or employment. However, Kim had very strong opinions about this and she wanted to express them.

> Wake up. They've got to wake up, because their child needs an education or they are going to be nothing because eventually welfare will have to end. It will have to end because people are really getting tired of it. It needs to stop. It's time for them to stand on their own two feet. They've got two good legs and two good arms. They need to go to work. Get a job and none of this horseplay stuff that they do. These women . . . I just don't get it. I couldn't live in this neighborhood, and I can't believe they are satisfied with this. I would want more for myself and for my child.

I did not know how or if to respond to her frustration with some of the parents' lack of ambition. I felt uncomfortable and chose not to pursue this conversation.

I happened to be at Fordham Elementary during the day of Open House. According to some of the teachers, this was the "typical" Open House held every year at about the same time during the fall semester; the teachers set out the books, display student work, and give a brief overview of the TAKS. I asked Kim about her expectations regarding this function. Again, she seemed frustrated with the attitudes of some of the parents. I asked if she expected a good turnout.

> Not really. No one comes. They are always too busy, some traumatic thing always happens at their house or they had to work. I said, and I don't work too? I stay here and I miss the time with my child. They aren't any busier than I am. Some of these parents don't even work, and they didn't even show up. They don't even have a job and . . . and see, I've always said, the government needs to tie education into welfare…that if these parents are required to attend a meeting, they just attend or they don't get benefits, they are taken away, the benefits. If they can't provide for their child, then the child is taken away from them.

Giving the parents the benefit of a doubt, I asked if it would make a difference to schedule Open House at more convenient hours for parents who may work late

into the evening. According to Kim, time was not an issue. She assured me that they would probably not come at anytime.

> I'll have six parents at the most that will show up tonight. The rest don't want to come. I had one kid say this morning, "My mom said she's not coming tonight." And they don't work, either one, the husband nor the wife. He said, "They aren't coming. My mom said to tell you they're not coming tonight." I said, "Hey, that's fine." They are too lazy. They are too lazy to get off their duff and come up here and deal with their child's problems.

Kim expressed her beliefs again that "many parents just don't care." She also thinks that some parents do not support their children enough, especially when tutoring is necessary.

> I tell them, you know, that your child has to pass TAKS in order to graduate from high school. If they don't pass TAKS in elementary, their chances of passing in middle school and high school are almost zero. They have to get it in elementary, and it's important for them to either come to tutoring. I had one that sent a note for tutoring, if I can find her letter. She wrote, "I do not give permission for my child to attend tutoring. I call it a waste (spelled waist) of time, because he got behind more than he did, plus he ended up flunking. He needs one-on-one, a helper, who really wants to really teach not just want their check." Oh, now I get it. It looks like the help he needs the school won't be able to give him. And they wanted him tested last year and the parents refused. She is not even willing to help her own child.

Kim shared an example of a lesson she did on writing numbers. This example, in her way of thinking, leads her to believe that the majority of students are welfare recipients and that their parents abuse the system.

> The other day when I was talking about writing checks, but I didn't tell them checks, I said, you need to write, how to write one hundred and fifty dollars and whatever cents. I said, "What are you going to use that for?" Nobody says anything. I said, "How about when you go to the store and you are getting ready to pay?" "Oh, get out the Lonestar card." That's all they know, welfare.

> So I had to kind of explain to them about the rest of the world and how the rest of the world pays for that. That people like me are taxed and we pay for that. I said that's not free. So if you think it's free, you better think again. I said those days of welfare are coming to an end because people are fed up with it, they are tired of it.

I asked Kim to tell me the three most important things the students need to know to be successful. She responded, "Being a good citizen, being responsible, and enjoying life."

> I told them, I said to be a good citizen you have to pay taxes in this country. You have a responsibility to take care of yourself and your family, and one of the things to do is get a job and get out there in the workforce and work.

Kim adamantly believes that citizenship is one of the most important concepts to teach "these" children. This is done in the form of teaching children to be patriotic and loyal to their country, according to Kim.

> Right, they need to know what it is to be a citizen of this country. From standing up to saying the pledge the right way and not slouching all over the place, and realizing why they are really saying it. They aren't saying it because that's what we do every day and we just rotely say it, but there's a reason for it, respect comes with it by standing up and honoring the flag and the people that died for what we enjoy today, and the respect for the service men and women that are dying every day here.

Expectations and Success

Kim believes that most of her Mexican American students just need to work harder. She thinks that there is a place for everyone and that the students can learn the skills needed to make our society productive. She also stated that not everyone is going to

go to college. I asked Kim what she thought her students needed academically to be successful.

> Academically, uh, all they have to do is put forth the effort. They are reasonably intelligent children, you know. There are a couple of kids in here that have very low IQs. And even they can succeed at their level….Not everybody is going to be a rocket scientist and not everybody is going to go to college, much to President Bush's idea. Somebody has to work at HEB [grocery store]. Somebody has to work at McDonalds. Somebody has to work at Dairy Queen, you know. We have to have those people. We can't survive without those people. We need people to work in the hotels. And there's nothing wrong with those jobs. They earn a living as well as anybody else. They are productive in society, more productive than some people. Not all these children are going to go to college as well as children in other districts. Not all kids are college material. Not all kids want to go to college. They have to realize that we all have a job on this planet to do. Some of us are not going to be rocket scientists. I'm definitely not. I don't want to be one. But there are people, we need people to work at HEB, we need people to clean schools, we need those people. We can't survive without them. We just have to come to the realization that all these kids do not learn at the same level, do not have the same capabilities that everybody else does. Some of these kids have low IQs, not many of them, but some do. And those children need to be assisted with life skills, not sit down and learn that the Rio Grande divides two countries, or there are five regions in the United States, who cares? That's not important for their daily life. I guess I would just change the fact that those children need more assistance with life skills. And those children that have the low IQs that don't qualify for special programs, they need to get extra help.

Kim tried to answer my question but was distracted trying to explain why not all students will be equally successful. She attempted to rationalize the different and lower expectations for some students by giving all students an important role and place in society.

Effects of Standardized Testing

I asked Kim how she understood and interpreted the data, statistics, and research regarding the poor performance of Mexican American students in schools. Kim believes that the students are not failing and questioned the statistics.

> See, I don't get it. I don't know where those people are, because in this school, these kids aren't failing like the statistics in the news, where are these people at? Yes, these children are behind. Yes, these children need more assistance, but I don't see them that far behind. It really irritates me when they talk about how the teachers never do anything. They just go in and do their job and come home. That's not true. I'd like to know where those people are, because they need to get rid of them.

The data indicate that Hispanic students have a higher dropout rate and that they are not going on to colleges and universities at the same rate as their Anglo counterparts. I shared this information with Kim. She hesitated momentarily, taking time to think a little more about the statistics. Finally she explained that she thought the teachers at the middle and high school did not have the same high expectations for the students.

> I think that's because the middle school and the high school teachers don't work hard enough. I don't think they care. I think that's the problem. I don't think they care enough. I used to be on a committee, and we were at a meeting and this principal from the high school said that her high school teachers were upset, never mind they have two planning times, they were upset because they were having to give one of their planning times up because they had to substitute another classroom. I really believe it's the middle school and the high school teachers' fault. I don't think they have any standards for the kids or any expectations. When we send these kids to them, we send good products. When we had the TAAS test, we sent 90% and over in some areas of our students that passed TAAS, and then they drop out and they do whatever and whatever. I don't know, maybe the other elementary schools

> weren't as great, I don't know, but we send a good product over. I don't know what they do with it.

To illustrate how hard she worked with her students to prepare them for the next grade Kim shared statistics of her passing rate on the TAKS. She told me about one of her students who was behind in math and reading.

> I mean, I never have anything below 90%. I think last year I had 86% because I had such a small class that took the test. I only had like 20 or something that took writing. I knew at the beginning of the year that this one little girl wouldn't pass anything. I knew the second week of school. She was so far behind. I tried to get her sent back to third [grade]. She passed reading on the third time. That already tells you there is a problem. The math she got 38% and they sent her to fourth grade. She already had two strikes against her and let alone we had writing to do, and I tried to get her sent back but her parents didn't want it done. So she is repeating this year. Every year I say, I'm not going to do that anymore. They are just going to have to be responsible and get that work done, and every year they are after school in tutoring and I'm there making sure they get it done. I push them and I push them. The only way you are going to get them to do it is you have to be after them. You have to be on top of them all the time.

Kim and I continued to talk about the stress of the TAKS and if she felt overwhelmed or inhibited by the test.

> No, the only part that overwhelms me is all the nonsense that they give you to do that goes with it. You know, this year we just have so much stuff. All I want to do is get up there and teach. Don't give me all this other . . . and then we have 20 minutes of breakfast in the morning that cuts into our instructional time every day. Every day we lose 20 minutes of teaching time. If I am short on time, then I pick out what I need to have, pick out the things that I need to have before I get to TAKS and pick up stuff I know is going to be on the test that has to be taught now. Then I teach those, and then what's left over I do in May.

Summary

Kim's "no nonsense" approach to teaching seemed to be her general philosophy of life. She continually expressed that her students just "needed to get to work," and in order for that to happen she "pushed and pushed them." When we discussed statistics and data indicating that the Mexican American students do not fare as well as Anglo students on standardized tests, do not attend higher education institutions as often, and drop out of school at a greater rate, Kim was puzzled and blamed the parents and middle school teachers. Kim also maintained that not all students are "college material" and that there is a place for "these" students in our society, particularly in the service industry, such as grocery stores, hotels, and fast food restaurants where they are needed and can be successful.

Kim and I had several meetings in her classroom. During our conversations, she seemed to imply consistently that the students' parents were unmotivated and were content with the "status quo." She inferred that most of the parents at Fordham Elementary were on public assistance. She referred to citizenship as an extremely important construct that her students needed to be taught so that they would appreciate all the freedoms of the United States. Kim believed this knowledge was lacking in her students. She often compared her students and their parents with those in other more affluent school districts. Kim used her own life experiences to measure and define normalcy in her students and their families.

Miriam

> *"These are the kids that need me the most. If everyone that had a passion for teaching left these kids, where would they be?"*

Miriam is a first-grade teacher at Fordham Elementary. Her kind, soft-spoken demeanor seems ideal for teaching 6-year-olds. Miriam said that teaching was a natural for her. Her father was a college professor and her mother taught art. Miriam comes from a long line of educators: her sister is a teacher, and her grandmother and aunt were also teachers. Miriam grew up in a small town in Iowa, and all her schooling until college was in Eventown. She took college courses while in high school and was able to graduate early. By coincidence, Miriam attended college with two of the other participants of this study.

After graduation Miriam was having trouble finding a teaching job. She interviewed in Chicago and on a Native American reservation in South Dakota. She went to many interviews but stated, "The districts wanted teachers with experience, they didn't want a brand-new teacher." Miriam is teaching in Texas because a friend of hers read an ad in the Eventown local newspaper. Woodburn Independent School District in Texas was recruiting teachers, and Miriam's friend invited her to come to the interview with her. Miriam chuckled as she recalled her experience.

> I had no idea it was in Texas until I got to the interview. There was a man named Jesus that was interviewing, I had my transcripts in the trunk of my

> car, so I happened to be ready. So I interviewed and they said, "Well, how do you feel about Texas?" I was, like, "Texas, where's that?"

She went home to tell her dad that a district in Texas was interested in her. He was surprised and asked her if she knew how far away Texas was. She was concerned about leaving her family but could not find any other teaching job.

> I couldn't find any other jobs, and everything was, everybody was getting back to school. I wanted a job. I came to Texas. I loaded up everything in my little car. I drove straight down here, and I'm driving and I'm driving and all the sudden I can't understand the language on the signs. I was like, oh, did I cross the Mexican border and didn't know it? You know what, I better turn around. I go to turn around and there was on this building, "Woodburn Independent School District." I went in there and the first person that I saw when I walked through the door was Jesus and Maggie Canter and they remembered my name. I was very impressed.

Miriam went on to tell me how Ms. Cantor had found her an apartment in a safe area. The furnished apartment was located on a military base and rented to both military and civilians. "Two little old ladies ran the apartments on the base….They put me in their building so they could keep an eye on me and help me out. They were like my grandmothers away from home."

Miriam was assigned to a fourth-grade classroom. "Back then the new teachers would always get the kids nobody wanted; I was in shock." I probed further and asked Miriam to explain why she was in shock. She shook her head and said, "A lot of the kids were very streetwise, and coming from a little tiny town in Iowa I didn't know all the things."

Miriam shared with me that Woodburn Independent School District was recruiting specifically at her college because the college specialized in "producing teachers." Texas had just passed a legislative policy that required a 1:22 teacher–student ratio in kindergarten through fourth grade. Miriam is still in Santa Ana; she has been teaching in Woodburn Independent School District for 18 years. After some difficult issues such as missing her family, a nonsupportive mentor teacher, and an allergic reaction to sun, she said, "I am still here and I love it."

The principal nominated Miriam as a successful teacher of Mexican American students for her "consistently high student performance, positive attitude, and strong relationships with her students and parents."

> It is evident that Miriam takes a special interest in her students. She has many requests from parents that their children be places in her classroom. She teaches the children of former students. I asked her to tell me why she had so many parents requesting her to be the teacher of their children. She responded that it was because she had been at Fordham so long. When I questioned that her length of service at Fordham as the only reason for her success, she paused and said, "Because I am not mean, I am not a screamer, I don't scream and I really like to get involved with the kids and be creative."

She shared an example of her involvement with her students that went beyond the classroom. Miriam was very proud and excited that she was invited to be a *madrina de corona* (godmother/sponsor of the crown) at one of her former student's quinceñera (15th birthday celebration).

I asked Miriam why she thought she was successful teaching Mexican American students.

> I don't know if it's just because of Mexican American, but I have a feeling for first graders and how to read. I had a lot of difficulty reading and I wanted to make sure that I could do everything that I could possibly do for these children, because I don't want them to have the problems that I had.

Miriam stated that she wasn't sure what she was "getting into" when she accepted the job at Woodburn Elementary, but she has stayed in the district for 18 years. She believes that she found her niche teaching first grade because she can help the students to read and hopefully avoid the same problems she had learning to read. Her positive attitude was apparent in our first interview.

Perceptions of Culture

Miriam and I moved the conversation to the cultural difference between her and her students. I asked Miriam to describe her culture, and she responded, "American, I don't really know, I have so many different friends that they are just friends. I don't say, well, he's my Black friend, he's my White friend, I just have friends."

I asked if she thought there were any cultural barriers between her and her students and she replied, "Only the language." Miriam went on to say that she asks the bilingual teachers to help translate for her when a parent does not understand.

I solicited Miriam to share her views on how culture impacts teaching and learning. I specifically wanted to know about the cultural difference between her students and her.

> I don't think, I think that all of their mothers try to help them just like our mothers tried to help us. I don't think there's a difference in education because of their culture. There's more that we cover because we talk about all the different cultures, and we talked just a little bit where I grew up of the different cultures but we spend a lot more time here. But that might have been the times. That was a long time ago when I went to school. . . . A lot about what their heritage is and things that they need to take pride in. Like being able to speak two languages.
>
> I can't speak two languages and I think that's fantastic. The kids tell me something in Spanish and I say, you know, I'm glad you can understand that but I don't know what you are saying. You are smarter than me because I don't know those things. I tell them that's really good and they need to hold onto that.

When I asked if there were general characteristics that her Mexican American students brought to the classroom, she responded, "Students' lack of experiences."

> They haven't had very many experiences out of the neighborhood. That would be one characteristic that I've noticed. We will ask different questions, have you ever been here? No. Have you ever been there? No. Oh, okay. So then we have to do a lot of background building.

Miriam added an afterthought: "And the order of the language is different. That's another characteristic that they have, when they, sometimes when they speak they speak out of order. I know that's cultural. I have to correct them."

I inquired if she had attended in trainings or workshops dealing with second language learning teaching strategies. She responded, "No, I haven't." Apparently Miriam believes the students have problems reading because of their lack of experiences and their second language acquisition. She sympathizes with difficulty reading from her personal experience. However, she did not have to struggle with second language acquisition and reported having a lot of support.

Perception of Parents and Their Role

Miriam had heard about the dropout rate of Mexican American students and had attributed it to the lack of parent role models. She stated that the parents want to encourage their children but that they do not have the "money to support their dreams."

> I think they are following in their parents' footsteps. They don't think they can go to college because it's expensive. They are the only ones that think they can have to get a scholarship, or they think they have to get a scholarship so if you aren't really, really smart, you know, why try? That's what I think the real problem is. They just follow in their parents' footsteps, and a lot of them have babies early.

However, like some of the other participants, Miriam noted that it can be a relief to not have to deal with overinvolved or resistant parents. Several teachers commented that a lot of "their colleagues who transferred to the "other side of town" say, "You think you have it bad, at least the parents don't bother you at the poor schools, but over here they are always in our face."

> Questioning, like, "Why are, why does my son need to learn this? This is not going to help him in the business world." A good friend that used to teach here with me, we used to teach Girl Scouts here together, and she went to Riverside and she said you know, the kids are, come better prepared, but the parents are questioning everything that you do. They want an explanation for everything. If you see some kind of deficiency and you want to get them tested, the parents will call their lawyers in and you really have to have your, everything in a row to sit down with these people because they will fight you tooth and nail. Here you get respected by the parents and they want their kids to do and they are here at your door saying, "What can I do?" Over there the parents think they've done their job already and they say, "Okay, why are you doing

> this? Why are you doing that?" But they know how important education is and they want their kids to be successful.

I shared with Miriam that other teachers had admitted that it was an advantage working in a poorer school where the parent involvement "isn't that great, but at least they are not bothersome and they are not questioning everything the teacher does."

Miriam went on to say that her students' parents are involved and attributed it to the fact that she asks for volunteers and to the young age of her 6-year-old students.

> My parents, I've always had really good parents, and they are always helping me, and I have volunteers. I'm just really lucky with the parents. I've always had really good parent involvement because I ask for it and they feel comfortable—of course the age, they are still babies.

I asked Miriam her thoughts about differences in Mexican American students and their Anglo counterparts in regards to their education and their experiences and their success.

> A lot of it has to do with parents and what the parents expect. Some parents care and they want to do whatever they can, and they are the ones that are here all the time. Then there are others, they are yours when they are here. During the day they are yours, whatever you do, you do. I remember my first year, I taught fourth grade and I had to do a home visit and we knocked on the door and nobody was there, so we went to her place of business, which was a bar. I walked in there and I said, "I need to talk to you about your son." She said, "I can't control him at home. When he's at school he's your problem."

Miriam expressed that working with low-SES, Mexican American children meant having more freedom to teach in the way she saw fit. Although she has had

good luck with parental involvement with her first-grade students, she believes students lack good educational role models and hence expectations for success.

Expectations and Success

Miriam confirmed what the other participants expressed, that Mexican American families do not prepare their children for school.

> They just think the teachers are going to do all the teaching. They don't do any teaching at home prior to kindergarten or prekindergarten. That's why we have a 3-year-old program here, because they need to have a basis to, and here in Texas you can come straight into first grade without any schooling at all. I guess in other cultures they know that the stronger you come to school, the better and the faster you are going to learn.

She went on to say that the students at Fordham are fortunate because of all the extra help they receive.

> We offer a lot of tutoring for kids that don't have someone that can listen to them read or help them learn how to read. We have programs after school. We have extended day. That hasn't started yet. Tutoring is Tuesdays and Thursdays, and we keep as many as we can that's reasonable for a small group. We have an extended day program that goes until 5:00 p.m. to keep them longer. We have Saturday programs where they can come in on Saturday, especially when it gets closer to TAKS.

Miriam shared earlier in our conversation that the students at Fordham receive extra academic support from the teachers. She also articulated her concern that her students do not receive the needed support from their parents to pursue their dreams. She believes that the children want to be like parents because that is what they know. She thinks that they need to know that they can "choose to do better." I pursued

Miriam's perception of parental support and success and asked her how she addresses this with 6-year-olds.

> I talk about what you want to be when you grow up. A lot of them wanted to be policemen because they could carry guns. I said, "Well, I want you to think about what job you have and what job you want to have and is that a good paying job? Will you be able to buy a really nice car and a really big house? Or would you have a little house and maybe not a car and have to ride the bus?" So those are the things that you have to think about when you decide what kind of career you want. . . . There was something else that went through my head, oh, we were talking about the war and how in other countries children have to do what their parents did. They are raised to do the same job that their parents are doing. But in America you can choose, you don't have to do what your parents do. You can go to college. You can do anything that you want to do. That's why we are so lucky to live in America because you get to choose. You can decide to be a bum on the street, but that's your decision. You can decide to get a really big house and a really nice car and get a really good job. That's why it is so important to be an American.

Miriam impresses upon her first-grade students that they are very lucky to be American citizens. Further, because the students are so lucky, they need to display citizenship skills as she defines them.

> I will try and get them to get some citizenship skills, like to be trustworthy. And I, right at the beginning of the year I make it a big point, you know, don't lie. That's worse than anything. Do not lie. I will tell them, you have one chance to tell me the truth. It will be easier if you just tell me the truth. That's something that I stress. I do not like people that lie to me.

I pursued her statement about regarding citizenship and asked her to tell me the three most important things she teaches her students.

> To be a good citizen, reading, the big one, but to be good people. To be honest and caring for other people and, you know, you see something, like on the street and, wait a minute, you can't make a judgment, you don't know that person. You have to meet somebody to make a judgment. You can't just look

> at somebody and make a judgment. You don't know what happened to them. You don't know what their life is like. I want them to care about people and animals. It upsets me the way they treat animals around here, very upsetting.

Miriam continued with another thought that related to caring for animals.

> They have cock fights. I had a student 3 years ago and he was telling everybody that he got a fighting rooster for his birthday. You know, you want to get the parents and just shake them and say, "What are you doing? You know that's illegal." I told them, I said, you know what, I don't want to hear another word about that, because that is illegal and it's against the law to do that. I told them, but they tell me about different things.

The discussion turned to student needs and I asked Miriam about what she believed to be the biggest needs of her students.

> Academically it would be reading, being able to read, practicing reading. And I think an advantage that a lot of these children don't have, like when you have little ones you want to teach them alphabet and teach them the letters before they come to school. We get a lot of them that haven't been exposed to it.

Miriam believes that too many of her students arrive at school unprepared for the basics, like the alphabet and colors, which then must be taught at school. I then asked Miriam how she handled the dichotomy of what she believed should be taught and what is mandated to be taught.

> I make sure I cover everything that I'm supposed to, but then I find time to do the fun things, because a lot of them are very creative and they love to draw and I want to instill that in them. Our curriculum is so set out and planned that it's hard to find the time but I try to. There are sometimes that I can't, some weeks that I can't, but sometimes I do.

Effects of Standardized Testing

Miriam stated that it is very important that her students are good citizens, and she does not believe that a test measures that. She thinks that high-stakes testing has taken away creativity and the fun of learning. Miriam is concerned that the success of the TAKS defines the success of the principal, teacher, and student.

> I've always wanted my children to grow up to be good human beings and good citizens and regardless of what test they take, I stress that and I've always stressed that.
>
> It's boxed it [teaching] in and it's taken away creativity, and you've got to target and you've only got so many days to get there. Here basically it's the basics. We're just trying to stay above water. There's not room for "frou-frou" is what [the principal] says.

When I asked Miriam if thought the TAKS prepares students to succeed in life, she responded adamantly that it does not.

> No. No, I do not. I think our time is spent so much on getting their scores where they need to be, like, for example, I have a friend that teaches in Riverside, they took the first test, the first practice test and she had 85% passing already. So she doesn't have to spend very much time. She can be creative and accelerate. We have some here that are at 30% or 20% passing at the beginning, so we've got a lot of work to do, a lot of after schools, a lot of Saturdays. They [students in Riverside School District] don't have after school and they don't have Saturdays. So they don't have to, I don't know, they don't have to work as hard as we do because their students know more, they are already at a passing level.

When I inquired why she thought this, she reiterated that the parents prepare Anglo students for school.

> I think it's the advantage of parents and what they've given their children before they start school and what they expect and the time that they spend, not actually time, but the quality of the time that they spend. They know this

> is what you need to know, this is what you need to do. We're just trying to stay above water.

Given the degree of extra effort required at Fordham to increase TAKS scores, I questioned Miriam about the inservice trainings provided to teachers. Specifically I wanted to know if teachers were shown methods to integrate the subject areas and to make it fun and interesting.

> Yeah, but our principal frowns upon it…she is looking for results and scores and she wants to be on top. A little bit of pressure. And being a Recognized [school] for so many years, the pressure gets worse. The passing rate gets higher. We can't just make a year's progress; we have to make a year and some to stay at the level. What she does is she will show our scores from last year—and we were Recognized last year—and she'll say, "Now with these same scores this year, if we just show one [years'] growth, this is where we'll be. Acceptable." She says, "And this cannot be." So we're going to have to, as hard as we worked last year, we have to work this hard and this much more.

Miriam said that analysis of the previous year's TAKS scores begins even before school starts. First-grade teachers already knew what areas the third graders were weak in according to the TAKS.

> Where they are weak. And then we've looked at the kinder ITBS [Iowa Test of Basic Skills] scores so we know what we have to build onto. Phonemic awareness is real low this year, usually it's not. And without giving them any letters, just all the oral work, they were a lot lower this year than they've ever been. We've already started working on that because that's a difficult one.

I asked Miriam her understanding of oral language development and how it relates to reading. I asked her if she thought the first language of her students might be Spanish and if that has anything to do with struggling to read in English.

> My students [speak English and Spanish] both, but Mr. Hernandez, his will be mostly all Spanish speaking. He, like, yeah, works side by side, English and Spanish. He's a first-grade teacher, but he is the bilingual lead teacher for our campus, so he's in charge of training the other bilingual teachers. He goes to the district meetings and he brings back the information.

Miriam expressed with some frustration that the campus was totally data driven, and the data that were analyzed were only from the standardized test.

> You can't just go by the book anymore, because the book doesn't give you what you need. It really is very stressful for the kids, especially in the upper grades. It's just a measurement; it should not be used to force or pressure the students. It shouldn't be used to pass or fail. See, it's never been in the past, but since Bush, you know my sister teaches in Iowa and they're all doing the No Child Left Behind, and they are really having a hard time in Iowa with it. I said we've been doing this for years.

Miriam believes that testing should be a measure of where the students are and should help teachers focus on what the students need to expand their knowledge and build on what they already know.

> I think testing should be used to measure but shouldn't be used to pass or fail; we're teaching the test. It's very frustrating.
>
> I've always wanted my children to grow up to be good human beings and good citizens and regardless of what test they take, I stress that and I've always stressed that.

I asked Miriam to describe what a successful student would be like. She described a student that she had in the past and knows very well.

> She is honest, she is very hard working, and she likes to come back and show me her report card and brag and say, "Remember when you taught me this and this?" . . . Successful, college bound, she hasn't thought about quitting. She has a boyfriend but I tell her, you be careful of those boyfriends. I don't want her to get in trouble. I encourage her to do the right thing, and I know her dream was college, so I encourage her to stick with that dream.

Miriam described a successful student as hard working and pursuing a dream of further education. I asked Miriam how teacher preparation programs and teacher workshops might improve to prepare teachers to better serve the Mexican American students and result in more successful students like the one she described.

> Probably to take some Spanish lessons. It would be beneficial because sometimes they will say just a few words, you know, they will say it in English but then they'll say something else, then they'll translate. But then you would be able to communicate better.
>
> I think it would be good to learn some of their history. I've learned some of their history because I have had to teach some and I will get little workbooks or packets from the bilingual teacher and I have to brush up because there is some Texas history that I'm not aware of. He [the bilingual teacher] will bring me some information. Mexico's history, I think that would be beneficial for teachers. And the beliefs that the culture has, like they want to touch, if they want something or they see something they like, they have to touch it or they can give you a bad spell or something like that. There's several of the little things that they do, like a string, to put a string on the baby. You can't pick the string up. You think, oh, let me get that string for you, no, don't touch that string.

Miriam did not emphasize the impact of standardized tests on student success. Rather, Miriam considers that the school is a safe haven for many of her students, a place that is worry free. She believes the children can get their basic needs met at school.

> A lot of them this is their safe zone so they don't have to worry. I remember one time I had a little boy that didn't have, this was his only meal and that was before we served breakfast. His only meal was our lunchtime meal. He would come in the morning and he would be drained. I would have a little breakfast bar tucked in my desk and I would give him some. He just couldn't pay attention or stay awake until after he had something to eat. That was, I don't know how many years ago. I will never forget him.

It is important to Miriam to be the best teacher she can be. She wants to do her best to ensure her students are kind and caring people who know how to read.

> My philosophy is that I am going to do everything that I can possibly do when these children are with me to make them into good human beings, good readers, good listeners and good friends. That's what I want to do.

Summary

Miriam loves teaching reading to first graders. She wants to prevent the students from having the same problems she had learning to read when she was a child. Miriam expressed that due to the children's lack of experiences teaching reading to them was a challenge. Additionally, the notion of citizenship seemed to be most important to Miriam. She believed that she could give her students a head start by teaching them citizenship skills such as honesty and hard work. These skills would direct them to make good choices and have the opportunity to choose to do whatever they wanted in their life. Throughout our interviews Miriam expressed frustration that the creativity and fun had been taken out of teaching. She blamed the high stakes of the TAKS for putting pressure on the principal, teachers, and students. "We teach the test and it's frustrating."

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS

In this chapter I will present the data analysis across the four cases. First, I provide a brief introduction to describe the participants and why they were nominated. Second, I describe and explain the conceptual framework I developed to facilitate the analysis of the data. Third, the analysis is presented using the emergent themes for organizational purposes.

Participants

This was an exploratory study of 4 "successful," White, female teachers of Mexican American students. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes, beliefs, and life experiences of these White, female teachers. By delving into the lives of these participants, it was my hope and intent to identify the common attributes and characteristics of successful teachers. These teachers were nominated for this study by their principal because she considered them to be highly effective with their students. The teachers were identified as successful by their principal for several reasons. According to the principal, the 4 teachers "went above and beyond, had high expectations for students, were traditional and no-nonsense, and had positive attitudes." The principal and teachers seemed truly concerned about their students'

welfare and believe that they are providing a safe haven for them at school. One teacher expressed her concerns.

> I worry about them so I know they are nice and safe when they are in the school. I know they are going to get all the meals. I know as soon as they reach out to me to get a hug, they've got that hug right back.

Another teacher commented, "I give them tough love kind of parenting angle and most of the time I think it works well." Miriam said, "For a lot of them [students] this is their safe zone so they don't have to worry."

All 4 teachers conveyed a commitment to success. To the principal and teachers, success was measured and determined by the passing rate of their students on the TAKS. They view the TAKS as a challenge for themselves.

> I like TAKS, it forces us to teach at a higher level and I think kids were getting short changed in education prior to it. . . . It is not so much that, as it is the stamina. It's a big rush for me, I want to do really well because I know how hard we work.

Each of these participants articulated their views in their own different and unique ways. They manifested distinctive characteristics in their delivery of instruction as well as individual discrete teaching styles. Their approaches to building relationships with their students were also different. This was evident in their perceptions of their degree of effectiveness and importance of building relationships with their students and their parents. Nonetheless, several commonalities were reflected in their views, personal attributes and classroom behaviors. These similarities and differences are evident in the themes that emerged from the data.

Conceptual Framework

The main purpose of this research project was to study successful, White, female teachers of Mexican American children. The definition of successful was left open to interpretation by the nominating principals, for the purpose of discovering what they considered to be successful teachers. There is an absence of research exploring the issues of race, language and ethnic diversity from the perspectives of White female teachers. Therefore, the selection of the participants was purposive; the difference between the culture of the participants and their students was a primary phenomenon of interest in this study. The degree of cultural congruence or divergence between the teachers and the students was an important variable.

I relied on the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) and Angela Valenzuela (1999) to develop a conceptual framework for the purpose of analysis. The model consists of two main concepts (a) culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings) and (b) subtractive schooling (Valenzuela). Using this conceptual framework, the voluminous amount of data was filtered through one of these perspectives, but not both. The following is a visual model that illustrates the analysis process.

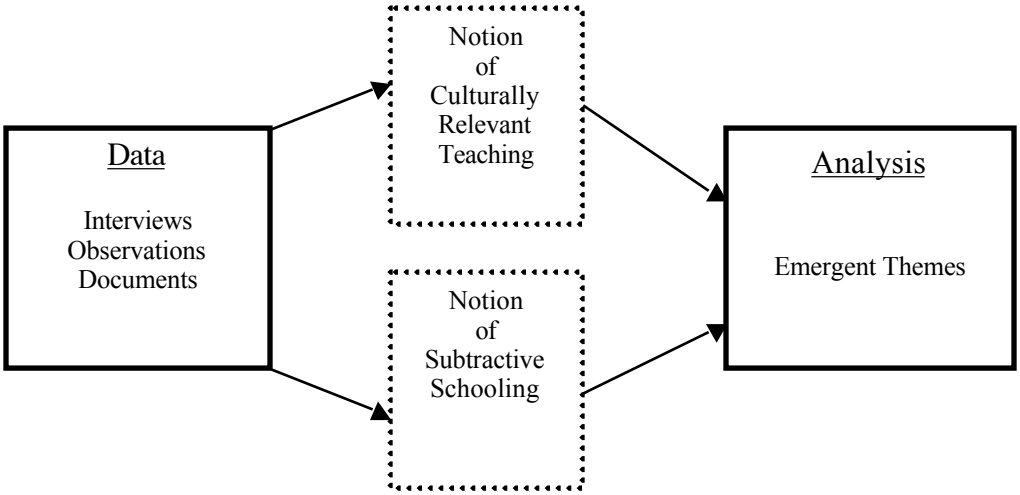

Figure 1. The analysis process.

For the purpose of analysis and making sense of the data, I used Ladson-Billings' (1994) notion of culturally relevant teaching (CRT) and Valenzuela's (1999) notion of subtractive schooling. These two perspectives served as analytical filters for the enormous amount of data that was collected. Two distinct models for school success or failure for minority students were consistent throughout the literature. The first model indicated that minority students tend to perform better and have more rewarding school experiences when they are in a school environment that is sensitive to their culture. Thus, a persistent theme in the literature was consistent with Ladson-Billings' CRT. The second pattern that emerged in the literature review showed that minority students tended to be less successful in schools that did not acknowledge their lifestyle or respect their culture. Furthermore, the literature suggested that the

underachievement of minority children is a result of the cultural incongruity between teachers from mainstream cultural backgrounds and their students. This type of literature resonates with Valenzuela's notion of subtractive schooling.

Data analysis is an ongoing process; the researcher begins to analyze the data during single interviews and continues from interview to interview and from observation to observation. Data analysis is open ended and inductive. There is no defined point where data collection ends and analysis begins (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). When I began my fieldwork and subsequent analysis I found myself more inclined to rely on Ladson-Billings' notion of CRT as a theoretical lens to make sense of the data. Based on the literature, it made sense to use the CRT lens because I was studying successful, White teachers of Mexican American students. The teachers were considered successful because they had consistent high passing TAKS rates. Also, based on the TAKS data, the majority of the students could be considered successful. However, it became problematic to use only the CRT perspective, because there was little or no evidence of CRT. The more data I collected and analyzed the more it became apparent that assimilation was pervasively imbedded in the everyday school experiences of the students. Intentional or not, subtractive schooling was the preferred approach.

The central focus of CRT is on the quality of the relationships between culturally relevant teachers and their students. Culturally relevant teachers are

personally committed to the education of minority children. This is important because it mitigates the problem of a "cultural mismatch" that is often an obstacle between White teachers and students of color. To culturally relevant teachers, the education of children of color is an additive rather than a subtractive process (Cummins, 1989; Valenzuela, 1999). Teachers who believe in and practice CRT view the culture and lifestyle of their students as an asset rather than as a deficit or an obstacle to their learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Teachers who practice CRT use the students' own culture to improve academic skills by making meaningful connections to their culture (Au & Jordan, 1981). CRT uses the students' culture in order to maintain it.

As I proceeded to analyze the data it became obvious that the CRT lens was less applicable as an analytical tool. The more data I collected, the more I struggled to explain and make meaning of the information. I became aware that I had been favoring Ladson-Billings' theory of CRT. This perspective is appropriate to explain student success but is problematic when examining teacher success as measured by their TAKS passing rates. I quickly realized that I could not rely strictly on only one theoretical perspective. I turned to Valenzuela's notion of subtractive schooling as an additional analytical lens.

Valenzuela, like Ladson-Billings, has maintained that culturally relevant pedagogy is critically important in the success or failure of minority students. In her study, Valenzuela (1999) effectively explained the harmful impact of subtractive

schooling on Mexican American high school students. Recent immigrants tended to do better because they were still firmly grounded in their culture; they had not yet been stripped of their "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1990). Valenzuela's concept of subtractive schooling was clearly evident even at the elementary level in the form of assimilation. The data presented showed that teachers paid little or no attention to culturally relevant pedagogy. Teaching their students "citizenship" was the disguise for assimilation. Their primary goal was for their students to become "good and productive citizens."

Elementary students are at the beginning of the subtractive schooling process; they tend to conform and show initial evidence of success. They offer little or no resistance at this young age. The participants all claimed that their students are performing well when they leave elementary, but their principal measure of success is their TAKS scores. They all expressed frustration about their students' lack of continued success at the middle and high school. The longer the students stay in school, and the older they get, the more evidence one can observe of the effects of subtractive schooling.

Emergent Themes

Four common themes emerged from the data: (a) teachers' perceptions of culture, (b) teacher's perceptions of parents and their role, (c) expectations and

success, and (d) effects of standardized testing. In this chapter I used the emergent themes to organize the data for the purpose of analysis. The common and diverse attributes and characteristics of the 4 participants are shared and reported using a descriptive narrative approach.

Teachers' Perceptions of Culture

Given the nature of this research project, it was not surprising that culture would emerge as the most ubiquitous and prevalent theme across all participant data. It is not possible to conduct a study about White teachers of Mexican American students without engaging in discourse about culture. The interaction between the culture of the teachers and the students seemed to be an ongoing process of negotiation. The teachers tried their best to understand their students, and the students conformed to the expectations without much or any resistance. When I first attempted to interpret the teacher–student relationships it seemed logical to apply Ladson-Billings' (1994) notion of CRT. I was sure that the successful teachers were engaging their students in culturally relevant pedagogy. There was little doubt that the teachers were properly identified as successful teachers, but their approach was not congruent with the premises of CRT. They were considered successful; they were well-intentioned teachers who were very effective in getting their students to pass the TAKS. It is only fair to say that all 4 participants made a special and conscious effort

to be sensitive and respectful of their students' culture. However, unconsciously or not they persistently imposed their own values and beliefs about schooling and parenting on their students and parents. Contrary to CRT attributes, the teachers consistently displayed assimilationst teaching strategies and behaviors.

Various subthemes became apparent under this major theme of teachers' perceptions of culture. For the purpose of organization these subthemes are presented in the following manner: (a) definitions of students' culture, (b) colorblindness, (c) lack of experiences, (d) poverty, and (e) family unity.

Definitions of Students' Culture

All 4 participants defined culture mostly in terms of the differences or similarities between the students' culture and their own. They focused on such things as their unique foods, customs, and celebrations. This was a simplistic approach of defining the students' culture. The teachers' interpretation was at a superficial level; they failed to acknowledge, recognize, and honor the diverse beliefs, perceptions, and realities. Hence, they were not able effectively to dignify and respect their students' existence as individuals. They focused on things (food, parties, dress, etc.) instead of on their students' thoughts, beliefs, philosophies, language, and family traditions. In CRT classrooms teachers use their students' cultural knowledge and lived experiences as heuristic tools to coconstruct knowledge. Furthermore, the students are allowed to

experience their own way of knowing, they learn to learn, and they are encouraged to think about thinking (meta-cognition).

Kim, for example, affirmed that she believes that she and her students do not have a lot of cultural differences beyond "tamales and piñatas."

> Well the only, the difference, the only difference is they have piñatas for birthdays and we didn't. I don't really see a lot of difference. They make tamales at, their food, they make tamales at Christmas. We didn't do that; we had oyster stew. I would rather have tamales. . . . Just like holidays and food. I can't see much, any other difference.

Kim's attempt to identify similarities and differences provided limited and superficial examples. She focused on obvious categories related to food and birthday celebrations, specifically the piñata, as cultural differences. Beyond these categories she did not see much difference between the two cultures, in spite of many other conspicuous differences related to language, religion, politics, and socioeconomics, just to name a few.

Velma made a deliberate decision to come teach in Texas. She was drawn to Texas because of her love of the Mexican American culture and, in her own words, the "different mix of people." Velma's interest and commitment to work with minority children, particularly Mexican American students, is admirable. It is indeed a noble motive. However, all too often, such altruistic intentions lead educators to a common nagging dilemma. We cannot assume, and we should not accept, that we do everything we do for children for purely unselfish reasons. One possible strategy for coping with

this conflict may be to find ways to balance and reconcile the assimilation of cultural differences.

The assimilation process works both ways. The natural hegemonic structure of education results in a pervasive social reproduction process (Foley, 1990; Giroux, 1983, 1988; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997). Teachers, by the very nature of their positions, impose their culture, values, and beliefs on their students; it is a dominant–subordinate relationship. This "natural" imposition by the dominant culture (White teachers) on the subordinate (Mexican American students) perpetuates the assimilation process. As students get older the effects of assimilation become more evident in students who fail to navigate the system successfully. Young students seem to be more successful because they are more conforming. As they get older, compliance gradually turns into resistance for those who refused or failed to assimilate. Valenzuela's (1999) notion of subtractive schooling is a useful concept to explain the gradual decline of "success" in the middle grades and the more obvious failure of Mexican American students in high school. This justifies and validates the need for schools that serve minority populations to consider seriously the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogical practices. In a way, teachers who practice CRT promote and participate in a reverse assimilation process. They are not content with simply meeting their students halfway; that is not their goal. These teachers are willing to cross cultural borders. In CRT classrooms, teachers assimilate

the culture of their students into their own epistemologies to facilitate culturally relevant and culturally sensitive learning.

Velma provided an example of how she expects students to adapt and adjust to her. She suggested that if she can "make the students relate" to her, then she can reach them. When asked if she thought the cultural differences impacted her pedagogy, she simply replied, "I just teach kids. I don't look at them as one specific way, they are just kids to me. We are products of our culture, you know, food, atmosphere, and the celebrations, and in some cases religion." However, she, too, resorted to a shallow but benign approach to understanding her students' culture. She refers to "their food" as a way to gain knowledge about their culture to help her students relate to her.

> I try to make them relate to me. I try to make them see beyond the cultural aspect for them. I try to understand their culture and their background, what they are coming from so that I can reach them. . . . If you are going to reach them, you need to understand their life; with these children it is tacos and refries and cascarones . . . Lucas [sour powder], I can't get over the sour things they think is candy, and it's completely cultural.

Velma tried to explain how she believed she was "indoctrinated" into the Mexican American culture. She gave most of the credit to her brother-in-law.

> My brother-in-law is Hispanic so I got a little bit of a taste of it from him. When I first started teaching he gave me a list of all of things to listen for. If they say that send them to the office. That was my introduction to Spanish.

Velma had an opportunity to acknowledge that as a teacher she learns from her students just as much her students learn from her. She ignored the possibility that she was learning more about Mexican American culture from her students than from her

brother-in-law. She implied that he taught her to recognize the bad words so the students would not get away with saying bad things about her or in front of her. This type of "cultural knowledge" propagates the negative stereotypes and the deficit thinking mindset about Mexican American children.

Further evidence of subtractive schooling emerged when I asked Kim to elaborate on the cultural mismatch between her and her students. Her response was hasty and impulsive; initially she said that the only difference between Mexico and the United States was that Mexicans spoke Spanish. She explained that recent immigrant parents displayed more interest in their children than parents who have been in this country for generations.

> Children are important to them, education to them is very important. They put their children before anything. Whereas, here in the United States we don't always put our children first like they do. If they are new arrivals, they are more inclined to put their child first; if they are second generation, they don't. They've lost it.

One of the participants, Pamela, was very specific about her definition of culture:

> Culture is the way that you are raised and the type of celebrations that you have, and so I always think of culture as their heritage, what they are doing, what their beliefs are and try to fit in with that.

Pamela said she tried to fit in by showing respect for her students and their families. She believes that she has related well because her students often invite her to their

family celebrations. Pamela believed that in spite of the cultural differences she is successful due to her genuine respect for the students.

> I think mostly mine is just out of respect, it really is. I think that's what makes me successful is that I try and fit in when I'm here I try and fit into what we do at this school and what they do, having their celebrations and enjoy their family celebrations with some of them.

Pamela genuinely believed that the main reason she is successful with her students is because she cares about them and respects them. It was difficult to discern from my interviews and observations how she manifested her respect for the students.

Miriam was not clear about her own culture when I asked her to describe it. Miriam said she was an "American, I don't really know, I have so many different friends that they are just friends. I don't say, well, he's my Black friend, he's my White friend, I just have friends." She noted the only real cultural barrier is language, but only for communication reasons. She viewed the students' ability to speak Spanish as an asset.

> A lot about what their heritage is and things that they need to take pride in. Like being able to speak two languages. I can't speak two languages, and I think that's fantastic. The kids tell me something in Spanish and I say, "You know, I'm glad you can understand that, but I don't know what you are saying. You are smarter than me because I don't know those things." I tell them that's really good and they need to hold onto that.

Miriam thought of culture as diversity and how it is critically important to integrate the different cultures in the school and the classrooms. She cited *Diez y Seis de Septiembre, el Dia de la Independencia*, and *Cinco de Mayo* as examples of cultural

celebrations designed to acknowledge and integrate the students' culture. Miriam explained that in her class she and her students "really talk about their culture a lot."

While it is important to celebrate important events of the mother country, many Mexican American children have been here for several or many generations. The celebration of their culture as Mexican Americans is excluded when the recognition of their culture is limited to historical events. These are the children who according to Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) experience "life on the borders, life in the shadows" (p. 55). They "straddle" the border between their Mexican and their American identities. They are marginalized; they do not connect here or there (Anzaldúa).

Pamela also identified language as a cultural difference, but unlike Miriam, she did consider it a hindrance to her ability to work with her students.

> My difficulty is that I don't speak Spanish and most of the time they are Spanish dominant. . . . It has not changed. They will come to me and start speaking in Spanish, I say I don't speak Spanish then they will speak to me in English but they will pick the Spanish first."

Nevertheless, Miriam agreed with Pamela that the students' first language (Spanish) was a barrier they had to overcome if they were going to be successful at learning. According to Miriam, "The order of the language is different. That's another characteristic that they have, when they speak they speak out of order, I know that's cultural. I have to correct them."

Almost all the children at Fordham Elementary are Mexican American, but few are bilingual. According to Kim,

> Some of the kids in here can speak both languages and some can't speak any Spanish at all. They didn't preserve their culture, some of them. I think their parents do but they just never taught it to their children.

One of the most obvious signs of assimilation is the loss of one's native language. In Texas, the most common type of bilingual education program is the early exit model. The goal is to transition the students to English as early as third grade. This approach contradicts itself because this type of "bilingual" program is designed to make students "monolingual" as soon as possible. Once the students exit the program, they will never receive instruction in their native language again. This does not make sense. First, the school system deliberately strips them of their language, and then in high school they are required to take a foreign language if they want to earn the more "prestigious" high school diploma. Language is perhaps the most personal aspect of culture, and its eradication is a prime example of subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999).

Colorblindness

The participants did not hesitate or struggle with my questions about culture; they were almost too quick to answer. As a result, in their zeal to provide answers, insightfulness and profundity were sacrificed for the sake of efficiency. It was my hope that my inquiry about culture would lead seamlessly to a more critical in-depth discussion about race and Whiteness without directly asking the questions. I wanted

them to make the transition on their own when they felt safe and comfortable. My cautious approach did not work as I had planned; I was compelled to ask the questions directly. In my own experiences as an elementary school principal, I have worked with many White teachers. It was not uncommon for them to avoid the discussions about cultural differences; in particular they avoided discourse about race. The same was true for my participants. Their responses were calculated and carefully crafted in the guise of "colorblindness."

The first participant to address my question about the construct of Whiteness was Velma. She avoided the question about her own Whiteness; instead, she deflected the issue by turning to her view of her students. "I don't really see color, I just see children. I don't understand data. I understand that it needs to be looked at but I just teach kids, Black, White, Purple, Brown, Green, I just teach kids." Velma's words seemed to be coming directly from Ladson-Billings' (1994) book, which I quote verbatim: "I don't really see color, I just see children….I don't care if they're red, green, or polka dot, I just treat them all like children" (p. 31). "These attempts at colorblindness mask a 'dysconscious racism,'" an "uncritical habit of the mind that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 31; King as cited by Ladson-Billings, pp. 31–32). Claiming to be colorblind is a form of denial; it means not valuing diversity and to teach to that end. "If teachers pretend not to see students' racial and ethnic differences they do not

see the students at all, and are therefore limited in their ability to meet their educational needs" (Ladson-Billings, p. 33). In CRT classrooms, teachers acknowledge cultural differences and embrace the diversity; they respect and learn from those whose life experiences are different from their own.

The participants in my study were adamant and proud about their colorblindness approach. This did not mean they were racist in the traditional sense. They did not consciously neglect or castigate their students because they were Mexican American. However, they were not unconscious of the ways in which some students were privileged and others were disadvantaged. They were keenly aware of this dichotomy, but their "dysconsciousness" was evident when they allowed themselves to perpetuate the status quo through an assimilationist approach. Unfortunately, the students in these classrooms are subjected to a process of social reproduction that can be better understood through Valenzuela's (1999) notion of subtractive schooling.

All participants provided ample data to support the pervasiveness of dysconsciousness in their school. Pamela, the music teacher, was also immersed in the same approach of denial.

> I look out and I see students, I don't see Mexican Americans. I don't, I think that what we're doing, especially in our school, I really believe that we never dumb down anything. We always bring them up and we have high expectations. It may take longer for those things to happen, but I don't, I'm really happy that I'm in this school because I don't make excuses for them at all.

Velma took the notion of colorblindness to personal level; she was not even able to see her own "Whiteness."

> I don't really think about them as Mexican American children, Hispanic children. I don't think about them like that. I just teach kids. I don't look at them as one specific way, they are just kids to me. I am not White and they are not Hispanic they are just people I try to relate them. I try to make them see beyond the cultural aspect for them.

Velma's comment, "I try to make them see beyond the cultural aspect for them," is emblematic of the dysconscious mindsets that lead to and perpetuate the insidious deficit-thinking paradigm in many schools. This paradigm is accepted in schools as a way to explain why children of color are inherently less capable, less intelligent, and less motivated than the more affluent children from the dominant culture. This paradigm suggests that if children do not change their culture, values, and physical appearance, they have little or no chance to be academically successful. Educators who accept this deficit model also believe that nothing is wrong with their pedagogy or with the school system in general. Blaming the victim is an endemic feature of this perspective; students and their families must learn to adapt to the programs and the teachers, or they will not succeed (Garza, 1998).

Lack of Experiences

The students' "lack of experiences" was a subtheme that was imbedded consistently in all the interviews with the 4 teacher participants. The perceived lack

of experiences was the result of the students' low SES; it was primarily related to poverty. Most of the children at Fordham Elementary have been identified as low-SES students. Their lack of experiences was also attributed to the parents' lack of ambition and thus consequent satisfaction with the status quo. For the purpose of analysis, an operational definition of the term *experiences* as conceived by the participants is essential. When referring to a lack of experiences, the participants really meant *different* experiences. Their students came to school with many meaningful and valuable experiences, but they were different from the experiences that were acknowledged, respected, and appreciated in school.

For instance, in general Velma believed that the parents and the family play a vital role in the education and the lives of the students. She acknowledged that the family is an important support system and an asset for her students. However, in spite of the positive role of the parents, she noted that the students continue to have limited experiences; they have not had "adequate" life experiences.

> They are very limited on the experiences they've had, their background knowledge on different aspects. Their vocabulary is very limited because of that lack of experiences, limited in their English language skills. . . . Many of them could [not] care less, that's not necessarily a good characteristic.

It was not clear to me if she was talking about the children or their parents; perhaps she meant both. In any case, it was still a negative generalization. Nevertheless, Velma did recognize that many of her students came to school with many experiences that other students would not ever even imagine, much less

experience. According to Velma, the children may lack "adequate" life experiences, but they do not lack of responsibilities at home. "A lot of them have more responsibilities than I ever had as a child. There [are] a lot of responsibilities heaped on some of my students. They are an additional parent in the home." Velma knew that her students were expected to assume adult responsibilities even as young children, but she underestimated the benefits of these experiences. Instead, she trivialized their experiences because they were incompatible with her own White background and way of knowing. Velma's persistent efforts to remain focused on the positive roles of the parents and family are commendable. Yet, in spite of her effort, she could not avoid the recurrent discussion about the students' lack of experiences.

> I think too many of these children . . . don't see that there is a whole world outside of their neighborhood. . . . I had a student who had never, only been to Corpus Christi once, she had never been anywhere outside of Santa Ana or even her neighborhood for that fact. When she went to Corpus Christi she was laying down on the bed of a pickup truck. So she didn't see anything. She was laying down in the bed of a pickup truck all the way to Corpus. I would love to put them on a bus and just drive them around.

Miriam blamed the students' lack of experiences for their limited vocabulary. She teaches first graders, and children at the age of 6 have a developed vocabulary, although not necessarily in English. Miriam also reported that the Mexican American students "haven't been exposed…they haven't had very many experiences out of the neighborhood…so we have to do a lot of background building."

Again, this illustrates the assimilationist or subtractive schooling approach to teaching. Rather than using the students' knowledge and lived experiences as a tool to teach, educators negate the students' language and way of knowing (Cummins, 1989; Valenzuela, 1999).

Poverty

Poverty seemed to be synonymous with the "lack of experiences" often mentioned by the participants. Most of the children at Fordham Elementary qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. This means that 95% of the students at Fordham Elementary were labeled low SES. It can be deduced from these data that most of the children could be considered to be living in poverty.

In her study, Sleeter (1992) found that some White teachers often use theories about poverty to explain the underachievement of minority children to curtail the issue of race in education. The use of an alternative theory perspective is problematic because it does not take into account systemic problems associated with race and ethnicity that impede minority students' ability to be successful in school. Discourse about poverty supports the explanation that the lack of economic opportunities for people of color results from their deviant values and cultural practices. It helps to exonerate the hegemonic culture from any responsibilities of the social structure constraints placed upon people of color.

One of the participants was not sure if her students' lack of academic success was due to their ethnicity or poverty: "I don't know if it's because they are Mexican American or their socioeconomic status." Velma's ambivalence is reflected in the following statement:

> I'm wondering if, and I'm just wondering, the district I live in is predominantly White, and I've looked at their data online and I've seen that it's, the White kids are passing at 90% and above. Their special pops [populations], their African Americans, their minority students, their low socioeconomic groups are struggling, and I think a lot of it has to do with the economic standard more than cultural.

The poverty of the students has a direct impact on the way one of the participants interacts and builds relationships with her students. She does not talk about her lifestyle with her students for the fear of making "them feel bad."

> I don't want to have them think that I think that I'm better than they are. I think that does happen if you wear too much jewelry or you talk about places that you go. I just don't do that.

Pamela was concerned that her more affluent lifestyle would make the children feel deprived if she shared her life experiences with her students. To Pamela, poverty is a variable that impacts the students' learning.

> This is my first [experience with Mexican Americans], and I did have to make a few adjustments when I came here, because the children don't seem to learn as quickly as somebody that's been out more and gone on a lot of vacations and had a lot of experiences besides just living in the neighborhood. I'm very careful about not saying things about when I'm going on a trip or something like that. I suppose I could share with them but I really don't, because they don't do that, I think maybe it would make them feel they can't go places that I go. So I just avoid doing those things. Every so often somebody will say, "Do you live in a two-story house?"

Pamela means well but made several unfounded assumptions. First, the students are smart enough to know that their lifestyles are different. Children do not think they are "poor" until they start elementary school. When most children start school as 3- and 4-year-olds they naturally feel good about themselves; they are healthy both physically and emotionally. Their parents have nurtured and loved them unconditionally the first few years of their lives. Once they start school, they learn that they are different from their teachers and their peers. Second, Pamela assumed that her lifestyle is better, not different, than the lifestyle of all her students. This may be true in some cases if the quality of the lifestyle is measured materialistically. Third, since most children know that Pamela's lifestyle is different from their own, the rationale for her decision not to self-disclose is illogical. Quite to the contrary, genuine self-disclosure is a powerful and effective method for building relationships with students (Garza, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Poverty is a common rationale to justify and explain minority student academic failure. The teachers in this study spoke candidly about the negative effects of poverty in their students' lives. They believed and resented that the parents had no desire to better themselves or their children. They believed that poverty was the reason for the students' underachievement and ignored the deleterious effects of racism or social injustices that resulted from oppressive nature of the hegemonic system. They proclaimed that underachievement was part of the "vicious cycle of

poverty" that was passed down from generation to generation. It was a cyclical process that was difficult to break due to the lack of education and ambition. They believed that the parents were satisfied and comfortable with the status quo.

Family Unity

The participants could not talk about the students without talking about the role of the parents. They claimed a strong relationship between the level of parent support and the success of their students. Overall, they agreed that parental involvement in their school was minimal. The teachers believed that they had to assume most of the burden for the students' academic success. Hence, the participants strongly believed that the Mexican American students succeeded primarily because of the teachers. Conversely, they thought that the White affluent students in the rich school district where their own children went to school succeeded because of their parents. This is an intriguing paradox; even when Mexican American students do well in school, their parents are not given credit for their success.

Nevertheless, the participants admired and respected the family unity and the strong bonds between the children, parents, grandparents, and extended family. Velma, seemingly envious, expressed her admiration clearly.

> One of the things that I love about their culture more than anything is the tightness of their families. Extended family members in some cases are all together and they really band together, cousins and uncles, and sometimes

> they all live in the same house, and you know, that's kind of neat. It's a family raising a child and not just a parent.

Velma acknowledged that family unity was an asset; it was a strength. However, her positive perception was overshadowed by the challenging expectations she imposes on parents who struggle day in and day out to provide basic things such as food and shelter for their children. The following statement illustrates this observation.

> On an educational level, they need parents who are going to be right next to them and involved. I know some of my students, I have a little girl right now who is, she is heartbroken almost every morning when she comes in because Mom works nights and Grandma can't help with the homework.

Pamela also recognized the constructive value of family support. She believes that her students' extended family support system is a positive and important attribute that promotes unity. She explained how it was culturally different for White, middle-class families.

> I think it's very exciting. I really do. They help each other a lot, and I think that's really exciting. I wouldn't do that, but again that goes along with culture. I think they do things more with family than we do. You know, we tend to, if there's a vacation, go off someplace and do our vacationing with our little family that we have, where they would party with their whole family, their whole extended family. I think that's so fun because there are a lot of people here that are related to each other. They help each other a lot.

Summary

From definitions of students' culture to family unity, the teachers' cultural experiences were diverse in some ways but similar in many others. The use of

subthemes served as a tool to incorporate the individual thoughts and ideas into the more inclusive, collective, and overarching theme of their perceptions of culture. The subthemes tended to overlap; it was a challenge to keep them connected and at the same time distinct and separate. This was an indication of the richness of the data.

Teachers' Perceptions of Parents and Their Roles

All participants had strong views about parents and the roles in the educational process. Many of their opinions revolved around their frustration with the lack of support from the parents. They overwhelmingly expressed that they wanted the parents to be more involved and visible at school. However, their genuine hope for meaningful parental involvement appeared to be ambiguous. They compared the radically different forms of parental involvement in the more affluent, White school districts with their perceived low or nonexistent parental support in their own school. This type of comparison is problematic because it results in an unfair "either–or" interpretation of the participants' beliefs about parental involvement. This unfair interpretation takes the form of ambiguity and contradiction. This inconsistency gives the impression that the teachers do not want one or the other. That is not the case with these participants. They absolutely know they want and need the parents to be more involved, but they seemed to be struggling to find the

middle ground between the two extremes. These contradictions all surface intermittently across the subthemes presented in this section.

The data analysis process was not an easy task for this theme. The data seemed to bounced back and forth between the conceptual framework filters. Sometimes data could be interpreted using the CRT and other times through the subtractive schooling lens. When I became aware of the participants' contradictions, I was able to make sense of my dilemma. The participants interpret parental involvement using the hegemonic culture as a template. This comparison does not take into account or acknowledge alternative perspectives about parental involvement. The teachers want the Mexican American parents to show that they care about their children's education the same way that the White parents do. Not only is it subtractive schooling for the children, but the parents are expected to assimilate as well.

Several subthemes emerged within the main theme of the teachers' perceptions of parents and their roles. Some of these subthemes cut across all participants, and some do not. However, they are all significant enough to be addressed separately. These subthemes are (a) importance of parental involvement; (b) efforts and activities to involve parents; (c) parents' quality and level of support; (d) parents' lifestyles and ambitions; and (e) teachers' attitudes, frustrations, and resentment.

Importance of Parental Involvement

All the participants want the parents to be more involved. They expressed that the lack of parental involvement is a serious concern. They feel that most parents relinquish too many of their parental responsibilities to the teachers. The teachers feel burdened, like they have to do it all themselves. Velma lamented that many of the parents are not significantly involved in the everyday education of their children. She explained that it was important for the students to see their parents at school. She believes that lack of parental support is demoralizing for teachers.

> I treasure those children who have parents who are always in their face and always making them do their homework because they really care. Teachers that are tired of having to deal with the apathy, the kids caring less and the parents not backing you up. Until you get those families involved, and getting the families involved is a domino effect. If Mom cares about how you are doing, then you are going to start to care about how you are doing. When the family could [not] care less and the child could [not] care less, you can't beat that.

Like Velma, Pamela also noted that lack of parent support and encouragement are lacking and that the teacher is responsible for "doing it all." She emphatically expressed how important it is for parents to assume a more active role.

> I think they [students] are getting a lot of encouragement from us, but I'm not so sure that they are getting the encouragement from the family. I've always thought that, again, this is my thinking, that the children are not encouraged at home because their parents didn't do well and I think there is a little bit of fear. . . . I think, go back to parents again; they've got to be sure they get their work done. If they don't get their work done, they are going to fall behind, fall behind, and that's how come they drop out of school. They are so far behind already, why even try anymore? I think after they leave here, there has to be more parent help when they go on; make sure they have the work done, make

> sure they are doing it. That's the only way it's going to get done. That's where the breakdown is, right there, I think, the parenting.

At Fordham Elementary the two main campus-level activities designed to increase parental involvement are the PTA meetings and Open House. Attendance has increased the last couple of years, but it has not been a significant improvement. Velma had only seven parents in attendance during the last Open House. She explained that even though attendance was better this year, it was still not very successful.

> I had two families where both parents were here. I had, the rest were single parents and I'm trying to remember if they were, are single parent households. A lot of them are that. I know a lot of my parents, one in particular, her mom works all the time. And she hardly ever sees her mom. Mom can't come; she's got to work.

Velma appeared to be in conflict. On the one hand, she was not pleased with the low attendance; on the other, she found it difficult to blame the parents totally. She seemed determined to generate legitimate reasons for the parents' absence. Velma was not only hard on herself, but also unintentionally critical of the parents. In her noble effort to defend the parents, she made assumptions that most children in her class come from single-parent households simply because only one parent attended Open House. She did not consider many other reasons why only one parent was able to attend (e.g., working parents, arranging for childcare for other children, etc.). The schedule of school meetings is not friendly to working parents. Velma agreed that it was very difficult for working parents to adhere to the school's schedule of meetings.

"Yeah they can't. It falls back on the teacher on whether or not you are going to get your parents involved or not. Sometimes it's just easier to not."

Pamela, like Velma, also understands that many parents have valid reasons for their absence from school meetings and functions, and she is aware that parents are reluctant to come to school to hear bad news about their children. Pamela believes that Mexican American children do not get enough support from their parents. She explained why she thought the parents are not more supportive of the children.

> When the kids come to school most of them don't know their colors, their numbers, the alphabet. That's something that I think that other cultures work on much more than they do, and there isn't the support, plus we have a big dropout rate too. I think that sometimes they don't help because they feel that they can't do it. I think they can, but they feel that they can't help, so they don't. A lot of people around here, the adults, they don't speak English or write English, and that's hard on the children.

Pamela made a special effort to explain that parents avoid coming to school when they anticipate that they will have to discuss their child's poor performance. However, she also explained that though Open House never has had a large parent turnout, the student performances and special events are always well attended.

> We have a big *Cinco de Mayo* parade here that we do that's our biggest thing that we really do here is that we have a big *Cinco de Mayo* parade. They have performances. You know the kids dress up, they make floats. . . . That's what we do, it's wonderful, it's absolutely wonderful. The parents will come and show up and we set chairs up for . . . a lot of participation. I think it's very important to get the parents involved so, you know, the children are just so excited because they are in the programs that they will come.

It is not difficult to notice Pamela's excitement about the special celebrations of the students' culture. This enthusiasm is transmitted to the parents, and they in turn feel invited and appreciated. On the contrary, when teachers transmit the opposite in the form of "bad news" about the students, parents and teachers instinctively build protective barriers. Metaphorically, these barriers become walls of absence and avoidance. Parents come to school when they feel welcome. This is apparently true at Fordham Elementary. Parents avoid the formal meetings and stay away from Open House, but they come in high numbers to see their children perform. School activities that are relevant such as celebrations of their culture that include their children are nonthreatening and inviting functions. They know they will see their children in roles that will make them proud. On the other hand, when they are asked to attend Open House, they are hesitant because they know that it will be about a judgment of their child. They may be reluctant even if their children are doing well because they do not know what to expect. They do not know the educational process as well as the more informed, affluent parents.

Only one of the participants reported that she had high interest and participation from the parents of her students. Miriam shared that her students' parents were very involved and responded well when she invited them. When I asked why, she explained that she often asked for parents to volunteer; however, she thought it was mostly because her students were still at a young age (6 years old).

> My parents, I've always had really good parents and they are always helping me and I have volunteers. I'm just really lucky with the parents. I've always had really good parent involvement because I ask for it, and they feel comfortable—of course, the age, they are still babies.

Efforts and Activities to Involve Parents

The teachers expressed frustration with the lack of support from parents and their low turnout to school functions. They should not assume total responsibility or blame for the traditional parental involvement plan that has been historically ineffective. However, their own efforts to encourage more parents to get involved remained very traditional. In some instances they seemed to be apathetic themselves; it seemed as if they really did not want the parents to be too involved.

In most cases, the telephone was the main mode of communication with parents. Velma explained that she repeatedly "harassed" parents on the phone, which worked a little until they got caller ID. Velma made it very clear that home visits were out of the question. Velma's commitment to parental involvement was not clear to me. She was obviously frustrated about the apathy of the parents, but she hesitated to try more creative ways to connect with them than a phone call.

Kim believes that parental involvement is very important, but she made it clear that she would not consider making visits to the parents' homes. She is available to meet with parents from 7:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. and said, "That's a wide range of times to come and visit and to talk." She said that if a parent does not answer the

telephone calls, she "tracks the parents down in the parking lot when they are dropping off the child."

Kim is inflexible about her availability to parents. She did not seem to be sensitive to parents who work during the day like she does. Although it may seem like a big time window, she is actually only available for meetings early in the morning before class, during her planning period, or after school. She is not willing to make home visits outside her regular workday.

I was at Fordham Elementary during the day of Open House. According to the teachers, this was the traditional Open House held every year at the same time during the first semester. Kim seemed to be frustrated with the parents' attitudes and was even resentful about being there. She did not expect a good turnout.

> No one comes. They are always too busy, some traumatic thing always happens at their house or they had to work. I said, and I don't work, too? I stay here and I miss the time with my child. They aren't any busier than I am. Some of these parents don't even work, and they didn't even show up. They don't even have a job and . . . and see, I've always said, the government needs to tie education into welfare…that if these parents are required to attend a meeting, they just attend or they don't get benefits, they are taken away, the benefits. If they can't provide for their child, then the child is taken away from them.

Up to this point, according to Kim, the children that do not do well at Fordham Elementary fail primarily because their parents do not care. Blaming the victim is a typical explanation. At no point during my interview did Kim ever acknowledge or

even remotely talk about the possibility that part of the problem could be the school system.

I asked Kim if more parents would be able attend if Open House was scheduled at more convenient hours for parents who may work late into the evening. Kim was sure that time was not an issue. She was convinced that parents would not come at anytime.

> I'll have six parents at the most that will show up tonight. The rest don't want to come. I had one kid say this morning, "My mom said she's not coming tonight." And they don't work, one, the husband nor the wife. He [the student] said, "They aren't coming. My mom said to tell you they're not coming tonight." I said, "Hey, that's fine." They are too lazy. They are too lazy to get off their duff and come up here and deal with their child's problems.

I was surprised that Kim accepted the student's word without question. Her prompt assessment that parents did not attend simply because they were "too lazy" was also a "lazy" and insensitive attempt to find the deeper, real reasons for the lack of parental involvement. There is no doubt that the teachers know that the traditional approach to parental involvement has not worked; however, they did not seem to be willing to change it.

Parents' Quality and Level of Support

In general, the participants resent the parents' apathy in regards to the education of their children. They interpreted the parents' absence from school

meetings and other school activities as an indication of their lack of interest. When pressed for a more concrete reason, they relied on the simple explanation that the "parents do not care." To make their point they resorted to a comparison between the caring parents of White children and the noncaring parents of Mexican American children. They seemed convinced that White parents are more involved because they care more about their children. Furthermore, they failed to recognize the possibility that the system is more acquiescent, amenable, and responsive to the affluent parents who exercise their influence and power to advocate for their children. The Mexican American parents of the students they serve do not have the same access to the educational system politically or socially, but that does not mean they do not care.

One of the participants explained, "On an educational level, they need parents who are going to be right next to them and involved." She believes the ideal caring parent is one who has the following attributes:

> I want them to annoy me. Constantly asking questions, messages to call home, how is my son doing? Can I have extra homework? She has a B and how can she make it an A? Just, they are very involved. They want to know every aspect of how their child is doing. They come in; they look and see what their desk looks like. They are looking for extra work. It's, to the child they are completely smothered and it's the worst parent in the world. But someday they are going to be thankful for that. The parents that beat on your doors, as annoying as they can be, you wish more of your students had that.

Velma was not pleased with the level of involvement from her parents. She made some sweeping generalizations when she compared the level or lack of parental support between Mexican American and White parents.

> They [Mexican American parents] are busy working and not at home to support the children as much as the White children. I hate to say it, but a lot of the White children seem to have a better support system at home. And so when you are reaching Mexican American students, minority students, you have to understand that a lot of these kids don't have a strong support system at home, and you need to provide it for them. That would be, I think the number one teaching strategy for Mexican American children. A lot of my Mexican American students are either from single-parent households or households where one parent works and the other doesn't speak English or doesn't have an education above the sixth-grade level, and so they don't have the support at home. You can't look at them through rose-colored glasses because there are no roses there to look at.

Parental support takes many different forms and can be manifested in various nonconventional, nontraditional, non-White, nonhegemonic ways. Velma failed to understand this possibility. Even parents who are not "schooled" or do not speak English can provide meaningful support for their children. Velma used her own rose-colored glasses (White lenses) to look for evidence of parental support. Until she finds lenses that allow her to see all colors, she will continue to judge Mexican American parental support based on her White way of knowing. She needs to be willing to learn more about the culture and lifestyle of her students or she will never be able to recognize the support systems that Mexican American parents provide for their children.

As previously mentioned, several contradictions emerged about the teachers' demanding need for parental involvement. The following is an example of their ambivalence. Velma professed the need for more parental involvement, but at same time expressed concern for her fellow teachers in the predominantly White school

districts. Her friends have to "contend" with White parents who constantly question them about their teaching styles and skills. Velma believed the White parents in her friend's school district were more involved. However, she seemed frustrated because the teacher's expertise was questioned. According to Velma, the main difference at the predominantly White school was the focus of the teachers. In her friend's school the teachers had to answer to the parents because the parents were at school often to advocate and demand the best for their children.

In comparison to the White school, the Mexican American parents at Fordham Elementary are less involved and thus less intrusive. Their absence from school may mean that they either trust school totally to take care of their children, they are too busy at work, or they may not care. Unlike her friend, Velma does not have to "contend" with the parents. Her students and her parents are different. "The parental involvement is so minimal that I have students to contend with." On the one hand, Velma is sincere in her longing for her parents to be more involved, but on the other she is ambivalent about the degree and type of parental involvement that may result if the parents become actively involved.

Many of the teachers at Fordham have friends who work with more affluent children and parents in other school districts. They constantly compare the advantages and disadvantages of their involvement in school. Their comparison is radical; it ranges from parents who are meddlesome and intrusive (White/affluent) to

parents who are not interested and apathetic (Mexican American/poor). Both types of parental involvement frustrate the teachers; the ideal would be to find the happy median. However, it is obvious that the teachers believe that the involved parents care more about their children's education.

During my fieldwork at the school site, I heard other teachers talking about the advantages of working in a poorer school. They acknowledged that parental involvement "isn't that great, but at least they [parents] are not bothersome and they are not questioning everything the teacher does." Miriam, another participant, shared some experiences about a friend who teaches on "other side of town" in another school district.

> A good friend that used to teach here with me. . . . She said you know, the kids are, come better prepared but the parents are questioning everything that you do. They want an explanation for everything. If you see some kind of deficiency and you want to get them tested the parents will call their lawyers . . . these people because they will fight you tooth and nail. Here you get respected by the parents. . . . Over there the parents think they've done their job already and they say, "Okay, why are you doing this? Why are you doing that?" But they know how important education is and they want their kids to be successful.

Yet another participant compared parents in terms of how she believed the parents' level of education impacted their level of involvement. According to Kim, schools on the "other side of town" (White) are not overly concerned with the TAKS and spend more time on acceleration. She attributed this to parental involvement and to the kids just "getting it faster."

> The parents are very involved with their [children's] education. They are educated themselves and therefore they put a higher priority on education. They are willing to go however far they have to go to get their child where they need to be, because they know that education is their only way to success.

Kim is correct; there is a high correlation between parents' education and their involvement in their children's education. Even though she knows her student's parents are not well schooled, she still tries to get their parents involved the best way she knows. However, Kim made a simple and superficial assumption. Although it may be true that "schooled" parents may be more involved, it is problematic to conclude that parents who are not "schooled" do not care about their child's education. It is likely that the level of education may be a significant variable, but I strongly contend that it is more about the power and influence that affluent parents have and use to demand the best for their children from the teachers specifically and the school system in general. Furthermore, there is significant research about successful Mexican American children whose parents were not "schooled" but nonetheless valued education in their own unique ways (Garza, Reyes, & Trueba, 2004; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Valencia, 2002).

Kim explained why she chose to send her own child to the more affluent school district, continuing her comparison between the rich and poor school districts. She thinks her child will get a better education in the predominantly White school

district. She decided to live in that school district precisely because of the "better" schools. Like all parents she wanted the best for her child.

> I want my child to start out right. I don't want her to be behind. They don't have the clowns in the classroom. They have, parents there really care about the education. I've visited some of their classrooms and they don't have the problems that we do with inattentiveness, sleeping, you know, it just doesn't exist.

The contradictions continued. By identifying the positives of her daughter's school, she was also insinuating the negatives of her school. Intentionally or not, her comparison was a degrading representation of her students, parents, the school, and the neighborhood. She assumed that all affluent students are willing and motivated to learn. Was her daughter's school better because the richer parents cared more? Or, was it because the teachers and services were better? Was her school district worse because the parents did not care? Or was it because the teachers were less competent? I asked Kim if she was referring to the Angle Hills School District, the wealthiest school district in the area. She confirmed that she was; though she had said earlier she could never teach in that district, that was the very district she chose to send her own child. In a way, Kim was saying that she was not good enough to teach her own child, but she was good enough to teach the poor children at Fordham Elementary. She chose not live in the neighborhood where she earns her living as a teacher of the poor Mexican American children.

Parents' Lifestyles and Ambitions

The participants admire the students and their families in many ways. They respect their strong family unity and the support system of their extended families. One participant was particularly impressed with their family support.

> They are very familial, they are family oriented, more so than where I grew up. They are in constant contact with cousins and uncles and aunts and grandparents, the extended family is more of an inner family. Where I grew up we all got together on holidays. These guys, they spend all of their time with their families, so they are more family oriented.

The participants especially appreciate the unconditional respect they get from the parents and the students. The teachers also highly value how their students show sincere and deep appreciation for what would seem "even the little things." The teachers are kind and sensitive to the children in need of basic caring. Compared to students in other schools, the children at Fordham are perceived as "needy" by their teachers. Pamela does not mind helping her students and is proud because they appreciate even the small gestures.

> They [students from Angle Hills] aren't as needy as our children are. One time I watched a boy, every day come in and he had shoes on and never had socks on. I bought a package of socks and gave it to his teacher and said, "You know, don't say who it was from." But you notice things like that more when you teach in a school like this than you would in another school. It was really fun to watch him wear the socks. It was wintertime too. They would appreciate something like that, something as small as a pair of socks.

In spite of the genuine admiration and deep sense of caring for their students, the teachers were frustrated with parents who were not supportive. They expressed a

universal belief that parents either could not help themselves or had no desire or ambition to "work harder" to improve their lifestyles. Some of the participants even expressed resentment about families that were on welfare. Kim in particular was adamant about their dependence on social welfare programs. According to her, the students' lifestyles are less than desirable and their parents seem to be satisfied with the status quo.

> Personally they need support from home because if they don't have support from home, unless they are extremely driven, then it will be difficult for them to see beyond what they have here. Some of them are satisfied with what they have. There are a lot of grandparents today that are raising their grandchildren because the parents are incapable of taking care of their own children.

Kim was not sure if students should assimilate or not. If students do not assimilate it means that they must be "satisfied with status quo," according to Kim. On the other hand, if the students assimilate, they risk losing their parent's support. Given this dilemma, she seemed to imply that either way the students lose. "It is almost like they lose by succeeding" (Garza, 1998, p. 248). In Kim's own words, "These people seemed to be satisfied and happy about their living conditions and quality of life."

> Whereas these people are happy with the status quo, the majority. . . . They are happy to live right where they live. They don't care if they don't have anything more. I don't understand it because, but it was always ingrained into me that you strive for higher. More parents, in the more Anglo neighborhoods, care more about education than people here in this area do. That doesn't mean that everybody in this area does not care about education. There is a small minority, but they don't care. They frankly don't care.

Kim seemed frustrated and took advantage of the opportunity to vent with me. This does not take anything away from the fact that she truly does care about her students. I tried to understand how she had come to this conclusion. She assumed that if parents were not actively involved in traditional ways, it was a sure indication that they did not care. Kim believed it was an obvious sign of indifference, which meant they were content with the status quo. Kim suggested that all of "these people" should strive to live like the "parents in the Anglo neighborhoods." She assumed that all the families want to live like the "Anglo" parents.

Teachers' Attitudes, Frustrations, and Resentment

Though no questions were asked about the families' participation in social welfare programs, Kim volunteered and expressed very strong personal opinions. Her resentment was obvious:

> They've got to wake up because their child needs an education or they are going to be nothing because eventually welfare will have to end. It will have to end because people are really getting tired of it. It needs to stop. It's time for them to stand on their own two feet. They've got two good legs and two good arms. They need to go to work. Get a job and none of this horseplay stuff that they do. These women. . . . I just don't get it. I couldn't live in this neighborhood, and I can't believe they are satisfied with this. I would want more for myself and for my child.

Kim believes that all of "these people" are abusing the system. Her ideological baggage impairs her ability to see the bigger picture and consequently she makes unfair

and prejudicial assumptions. The following quote clearly depicts her personal disgust with her perceived abuse of the system.

> The other day when I was talking about writing checks, but I didn't tell them checks, I said, "You need to write, how to write one hundred and fifty dollars and whatever cents." I said, "What are you going to use that for?" Nobody says anything. I said, "How about when you go to the store and you are getting ready to pay." "Oh, get out the Lonestar card." That's all they know, welfare. So I had to kind of explain to them about the rest of the world and how the rest of the world pays for that. That people like me are taxed and we pay for that. I said that's not free. So if you think it's free, you better think again. I said those days of welfare are coming to an end because people are fed up with it, they are tired of it.

Miriam expressed frustration with the parents' inability to help their children. She was critical of the parents' complacency and how it transmitted to their children.

> I think they are following in their parents' footsteps. They don't think they can go to college because it's expensive. They are the only ones that think they can have to get a scholarship, or they think they have to get a scholarship so if you aren't really, really smart, you know, why try? That's what I think the real problem is. They just follow in their parents' footsteps, and a lot of them have babies early.

Summary

The participants believe that parental involvement is critically important. They want their parents to take a more active role in the education of the children, but they have not tried more creative, less traditional strategies to encourage their involvement. They interpret the parents' absence as an indication that they do not

care, but they also try to justify it. Overall, they believe they are trying their best to be more inclusive of the parents.

Expectations and Success

The teachers were asked to provide a description of what they thought was a successful student. Their perceptions of the students were generally connected to their culture, lifestyles, language, and socioeconomic status. The participants' characterization of the students and their definitions of success resulted in the overall theme of the teachers' expectations of the students. This theme emerged from the portraits the teachers painted of their students.

Several subthemes were identified that were useful in the analysis of the central theme. These subthemes tended to be overlapping and spiraling: (a) definition of successful student, (b) expectations, (c) working hard, (d) discipline and abuse, and (e) citizenship.

Definition of a Successful Student

The participants' definition of a successful student was very limited, restrictive, and latent with deficit thinking. The 4 participants unanimously defined the successful student as "a student who works to their ability, who tries their best." "Trying their best" was a way to justify low long-range expectations. The teachers

often mentioned that if the students' best is only to work at McDonalds or HEB, it was fine as long as they are doing their best. According to one participant,

> If you are going to work at McDonalds, do it right. That to me is a successful student. . . . My one student I spoke of earlier today that had always failed, he is probably beyond, he's 18 and he's probably still a junior, if he's a junior this year. He struggles with school. It's never going to be easy for him. He may never graduate, but he is still trying. That to me is a successful student.

Pamela mentioned one of her former students as an example of a successful student. She spoke of her student with admiration and pride.

> He went off to college. While he was here he was just an exemplary student. His mother started a Boy Scout troop here, and he is working on his Eagle Scout right now. I attribute a lot to his parents. They didn't go to college and they just do the same things that I do, you can do this. You just find a way. He went on a basketball scholarship to a private college. I'm just so proud of him.

Pamela inferred throughout our conversation that Hispanic children are less likely to do well, and she was surprised when one of the students who grew up in the community did well or "goes on to college." Pamela acknowledges the parents' role and gives them their due credit. However, they have to share their accomplishment with the Boy Scouts. The mother contributed to her son's success by providing him with the knowledge and opportunities to either assimilate or navigate the system.

Expectations

The teachers at Fordham Elementary set both high and low expectations for their students. Their high expectations were short range; they expected and helped all

their students pass the TAKS. They took this challenge personally and seriously. Velma expressed her commitment clearly.

> I'm going to find a way to make whatever subject it is, language arts or social studies, benefit my students in TAKS by making sure that the way that I'm instructing them in that subject is going to be something that they can incorporate into their TAKS skills. TAKS keeps me more focused.

Teachers were totally focused and dedicated to this challenge, and they wanted the highest passing rates in the district. One participant expressed her disillusionment with lower passing rates.

> I cried last year. I sat in the principal's office and we cried together because I've always had good scores. I had 100% passing math for 6 or 7 years . . . But what really bothered me was science. I had like a 60% passing rate in science and that mortifies me. The year before I had the best passing rate in the district.

They assumed that passing this exam was a high expectation they set for their students. However, the competition for the highest passing rates was the driving force for the high expectations they set for themselves, not the students. One teacher said, "Last year less of my students passed, which completely disheartened me, because as a teacher you are your numbers and . . . I was a 60% teacher. No. I was [used to be] a 100% teacher." At Fordham Elementary the teachers and the students were relatively successful as measured by the TAKS; teachers had high passing rates and most students passed.

However, their long-range expectations were disturbingly low. By and large the teachers at Fordham Elementary believed their students were limited and deficient

because of their "lack of experiences" due to their culture. Their expectations of their students beyond high school were dismally low. Three of the 4 teachers stated, "Not all students are college material," and the 4th said, "Not everyone is going to college." They believed that not all students were "college material and that there is a place for these students in our society." Their place in society was in the workforce; they could be productive and successful working in grocery stores, hotels, and fast food restaurants.

> Not everybody is going to be a rocket scientist, and not everybody is going to go to college, much to President Bush's idea. Somebody has to work at HEB. Somebody has to work at McDonalds. Somebody has to work at Dairy Queen, you know. We have to have those people. We can't survive without those people. We need people to work in the hotels. And there's nothing wrong with those jobs. . . . They are productive in society, more productive than some people. . . . They have to realize that we all have a job on this planet to do. . . . We need people to clean schools, we need those people. We can't survive without them. We just have to come to the realization that all these kids do not learn at the same level, do not have the same capabilities that everybody else does. Some of these kids have low IQs, not many of them, but some do.

If they do not go to college or cannot find a job after graduation from high school, another viable option for the students is to join the armed forces. One of the participants explained why she thought joining the military was a good option: "If they joined the military, hallelujah. I think all kids should go through the military just to learn that self-discipline aspect and respect for their country."

In summary, the teachers defined the successful student as one who is resilient persistent, determined, and college bound. Their definition was not congruent with

their expectations of their students. They did not expect many of their students to attend college. They rationalized that working in minimum-wage service jobs was an indication of success as long they "tried their best."

Schools are systems of social reproduction (Foley, 1990; Valencia, 2002). Deficit thinking not only stratifies the social order, but also perpetuates low expectations for students of color. Educators who ascribe to the deficit-thinking paradigm place total responsibility for school failure on the students' lack of readiness to learn, the parents' lack of interest, and the families' lifestyles. The teachers expected most of their students to follow in their parents' footsteps, and most of their parents are not schooled. Miriam said,

> I think they are following in their parents' footsteps. They don't think they can go to college because it's expensive. . . . That's what I think the real problem is. They just follow in their parents' footsteps and a lot of them have babies early.

Kim made some generalizations about how the students are affected by the parents' complacency. The teachers' low expectations are a consequence of their frustration with their perceived complacent attitudes of the parents.

> Whereas these people are happy with the status quo, the majority . . . they are happy to live right where they live. They don't care if they don't have anything more. . . . More parents, in the more Anglo neighborhoods, care more about education than people here in this area do. That doesn't mean that everybody in this area does not care about education. There is a small minority, but they don't care. They frankly don't care.

One participant proudly proclaimed that "we don't make excuses because our population is 99% Hispanic. We don't make excuses for that." Her attempts to hold the students to high standards regardless of their ethnicity are well intentioned. She seemed to imply that being Hispanic required an excuse. The teacher's deliberate effort to expect the same from Hispanic students indicated that she unconsciously has different expectations for Hispanic students. She still expected all of her students "to follow the rules. I expect them to do the curriculum. I expect them to sing. I expect them to read whatever it is we are supposed to do and they come up to my expectations." Another participant said the same thing in a different way.

> I really believe that we never dumb down anything. We always bring them up and we have high expectations. It may take longer for those things to happen, but I don't, I'm really happy that I'm in this school, because I don't make excuses for them at all.

The teachers' noble intentions were evident, but in the same breath they expressed lower expectations. It was not an easy task to make sense of this caveat. The teachers are expected to have high expectations of students, but it should not take a special effort to avoid "dumbing down the curriculum" if they are serving students of color—in this case, Mexican American children.

The low expectations of the teachers were obvious in many ways. When the teachers expressed that the "parents were satisfied with the status quo," it seemed as if they also had accepted the status quo. Pamela seemed to have given up.

> I think it just is what it is. I don't think it's going to change. . . . I'm seeing the kids now. I'm getting my students' kids, they are not being successful either. I've been here so long I know the families really well and so I can ask about the brothers and sisters or the mothers and grandparents too. . . . They come back and they visit me all the time and bring their babies back, and I am teaching some of their babies now.

Teachers often articulated that they had high expectations for their students, but their ideological beliefs did not coincide with their statements. Getting a service job, joining the army, or going to a community college was perfectly fine as long as "they tried their best." These expectations are compatible with the deficit-thinking paradigm; this type of mindset perpetuates a system of social reproduction (Foley, 1990; Willis, 1982).

Working Harder

There was a general belief among the teachers that most students can be successful if they only worked harder. The participants all believe that if students work harder they can learn the skills needed in a productive society. "All they need to do is put forth the effort. They are reasonably intelligent children, you know. There are a couple of kids in here that have very low IQs. And even they can succeed at their level."

Working harder is a schoolwide belief that is supported by the administration. Students work hard and long hours after school, Saturdays, and during the summer. They are expected and sometimes required to attend many of the programs designed

to help them improve their skills. Some of these programs are (a) Tutoring on Tuesdays and Thursdays, (b) extended day until 5:00 p.m., (c) Saturday programs, (d) extra academic support from the teachers, (e) summer school, and (f) a program for 3-year-olds.

The teachers believe they are successful because they constantly encourage and coerce their students to work hard. Kim said, "I work really hard. I'm always on them. I never give up on them. I ride them until they can't do it anymore. I make them see that they can be successful. You just keep working at them."

The teachers were willing to do whatever was necessary to help their students. They made the students work harder and longer hours. Another participant validated this observation.

> I keep them after school. I sometimes keep them in during PE. I know I'm not supposed to. Sometimes I will work in the morning with them. Sometimes I will stay later and work with them. I just keep at them all the time. I always make sure that they are on top of things, and then I call the parents. I talk to the parents. I try to get them involved as much as possible.

The teachers are to be admired and commended for their persistent efforts to make the students "work harder." Whereas some students may do better under the constant pressure to work harder, others may need a different approach. Based on the extra work and time in the form of tutoring, extended day, summer school, and other programs, it is evident that the students are working hard. It is simplistic to assume that if students "just work harder," they will be successful. This implies that students

who are not doing well are lazy. This explanation does not take into account other variables such as the quality of instruction, learning and teaching styles, and pedagogical issues, to name a few. If the students fail it is due to their lack of motivation, and if they succeed it is because the teachers just make them "work harder." There was no discussion about the subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) effects of the school system on minority students.

Discipline and Abuse

This subtheme is divided into two sections. The first is a discussion of discipline in general, and the second is a brief analysis of the emotional and intellectual abuse that results from individual teacher discipline strategies.

Discipline. At Fordham Elementary the student discipline plan is traditional and straightforward. Teachers are expected to take care of the everyday student management issues, but certain behaviors require a referral to the principal. During one of my observations a teacher admonished a male student. I had seen this same student in the office the first day I started my fieldwork. Apparently the student had not done his homework and was going to miss PE class. He was very upset about missing PE; he was crying and refused to stay at his desk. The teacher called the assistant principal to remove him from class. As the student was leaving the room with the assistant principal, she yelled in front of the other students, "I don't get paid enough

to put up with this!" Later I found out that this same student was not allowed to play football because he was failing. It was a common practice for teachers to keep students from PE as a way to punish them.

Teachers were asked how they generally handled discipline and if their strategies or techniques took students' background or culture into consideration. Unanimously, all the participants were surprised that they should consider taking their students' culture into account in their approach to discipline management.

Kim's approach is based on a set of classroom rules that communicates to her students at the beginning of the year. She reviews the rules when a student commits an infraction.

> I tell them the rules at the beginning, and then we go over the rules, and every time somebody breaks one you look at the rules, you go over it. . . . Occasionally, they get out of control and they get silly, but not really. I give them detention, but as far as them being Mexican American. They don't look at you. Not all of them though, but it is true and I always have to make them look at me. . . . I don't know if that's culture or just kids all over. . . . I don't know, people say that's a cultural thing. But I've even had African American kids that don't look at you because they know they are guilty. That's how you know they are guilty, because they don't look at you. They look down here like this. Even when I taught at Woolworth and there were Anglo children over there, they didn't look at you sometimes either because they were guilty.

Velma was in agreement with Kim. Both mentioned eye contact as a reactive behavior to discipline that could be related to culture.

> I noticed when I first started, especially in fifth grade, when I'm talking to a child, I expect them to look at me. And I've never experienced this except with my students here in Woodburn, they won't look you in the eye. I don't know if that's a pride thing or if it's, "I'm in trouble and I'm not going to look at

> you." I don't know. Getting them to make eye contact with you when you are talking to them or getting after them is a big thing.

Velma was not sure if eye contact was directly related to the students' culture, but she was willing to accept it as a possibility. Her approach to behavior management did take into account individual differences, but not specifically based on culture.

> I don't know specific strategies. . . . If he's not going to look at me and it's not a sign of disrespect, it's just what he's used to. You can't approach a child and say, he's Mexican American, I have to approach him one certain way. You can't do that because they are kids and each child is different. What I do with one child isn't going to work with another. The way I have to coddle and pamper and coax one along isn't going to work with the next one. So I don't know it as being a strategy for a Mexican American child, I just know it as a strategy for this particular child.

Pamela on the other hand, was not concerned about discipline. She relies on her long-term relationships with the parents and the students to maintain proper student behavior.

> If I have a discipline problem, it's mainly talking to them. It's not a big problem. . . . I don't look at them and say, these are Mexican Americans; one of the things that is nice about me is that I've known these kids for so long and their parents for so long that I can even say, "Do I need to talk to your mother?" That takes care of the behavior right there, because they know that I will do that if I need to. I would do that to anybody.

The participants were not able to identify culturally specific behaviors. Thus, they could not identify strategies or major differences in the types of behavior modification interventions for Mexican American students. They thought the students' lack of eye contact could be related to their culture, but they were not sure.

In any case, some participants gave Mexican American children the benefit of the doubt and others did not. Some participants thought the students' refusal to make eye contact as a sign of guilt, and others had no opinion.

Abuse. There was an informal and less visible approach to discipline, which was sometimes verbally abusive and humiliating. One of the participants prides herself as a no-nonsense teacher. Her no-nonsense approach was clearly evident, she said: "They don't have a value of education in their life, I lay it on the line. I tell them this work is crap!" I had he opportunity to spend some time in the classrooms to observe the teachers. During one of my observations, I heard one of the teachers yelling to her student, "You're not listening, no baby stuff, you have to know this, because if you don't you won't pass the TAKS." Within a very short time frame, less than 30 minutes, the teacher stopped to reprimand the class over 20 times, shouting and telling students, "I'm talking, you're listening; you need to be quiet; no talking, shh, shh, knock it." She continuously harassed a particular student and embarrassed her by constantly calling on her. The student did not know any of the answers, and the teacher never let up on her. The student was obviously humiliated and eventually just shut down. Physically she was there, but she was an emotional and mental dropout.

Students are not allowed to talk in the lunchroom. "No talking in the cafeteria (lights were turned off). No talking!" screamed the principal. Students were lined up

with their faces against the wall for talking. Another teacher constantly used sarcasm. During a classroom observation she responded to one of her student's answers by saying, "I can't believe Andres had a thought, let me write it down." Another time I walked with the teacher and students down the hall to their PE class. For no apparent reason, the teacher made the students turn around and walk back and forth to the classroom six times. From my observations in general the students at Fordham were well behaved and extremely compliant. Watching 4-year-olds walking in straight lines with one hand over their mouths and the other one behind their backs caused me great anxiety.

Citizenship and Respect

This subtheme is a combination of the notion of citizenship and the notion of respect; they will be discussed simultaneously. Teachers often talked about the need to teach their students how to be productive citizens. If students are to become good citizens, they must learn "respect for their country," according to one of the participants. This was evident in every classroom I visited during my fieldwork. The students started their daily activities with "The Star-Spangled Banner." It was interesting to watch the monolingual Spanish-speaking children with their hands over their hearts attempting to say the words in English. Most of them were just moving their mouths, pretending to sing.

Learning to be good citizens meant teaching students to be honest, caring, sensitive, and respectful. To Kim, citizenship is the most important concept to teach "these" children. She said, "They need to know what it is to be a citizen of this country." She provided examples of the activities she used to teach her students respect and loyalty: "standing up to saying the pledge the right way and not slouching all over the place, and realizing why they are really saying it." She does not want her students to take the ritual for granted.

> They aren't saying it because that's what we do every day and we just rotely say it, but there's a reason for it, respect comes with it by standing up and honoring the flag and the people that died for what we enjoy today, and the respect for the service men and women that are dying every day here.

Kim was convinced that citizenship was critically important if the students were going to learn to truly appreciate all the freedoms they enjoy in the United States of America.

Miriam believes it is important to teach students citizenship as early as possible. She makes a special effort to teach her first-grade students the key values of a good citizen.

> I will try and get them to get some citizenship skills, like to be trustworthy. And I, right at the beginning of the year I make it a big point, you know, don't lie. . . . I will tell them, you have one chance to tell me the truth. It will be easier if you just tell me the truth. That's something that I stress. I do not like people that lie to me.

To Pamela respect is very important because "if they don't respect the teachers, their classmates and respect the work that they need to do, they are not

going to succeed." In addition to respect, Pamela wants her students to learn and practice the virtues of compassion and sensitivity. In her role as teacher Pamela believes that the most important things she can teach her students are respect, compassion, and sensitivity. She believes her students must show compassion for each other.

This subtheme illustrates the teachers' overt and subtle efforts to assimilate their students by making a conscious decision to teach them how to be "good citizens." This was done in the form of teaching their students to be patriotic and loyal to their country.

The assimilation process starts early in schools. In the process of assimilation minority students are at risk of losing touch with their culture if teachers ignore the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy. The participants assumed total responsibility to teach the values and beliefs characteristic of a model citizen as if the students came to school devoid of any morals or principles. Most of the values of a "good" human being are common across all cultures; students learn them at home from their parents and family. Perhaps the teachers' main responsibility should be to support, enhance, and use the knowledge the children already possess, as suggested by Ladson-Billings (1994) and Valenzuela (1999).

Effects of Standardized Testing

The current movement to hold schools accountable has relied on the use of standardized testing as the principal instrument to measure the success of failure of the students and the school systems. Recent federal and state mandates have raised accountability standards with severe sanctions for students and schools if they fail to meet them. The success or failure of students at Fordham Elementary is primarily measured by their degree of performance on the TAKS standardized exam. This is true for the teachers as well. The participants were nominated for this study by their principal because of their high passing rates on the TAKS.

Across the nation's schools, there seems to be a general acceptance of the persistent efforts of policymakers to reproduce an educational system that leads to rote, superficial, standardized thinking and intellectual abuse. This type of system perpetuates the stratification of the hegemonic sequence of testing and the constant low-level cycle of remediation (Sacks, 1999). High-stakes standardized testing promotes and encourages the deficit-thinking practice of "teaching the basics." Unfortunately, most often minority children continue to be trapped in this perpetuating cycle of exclusion. This creates another gap referred to as the "invisible" gap. This is the exclusive knowledge and experiences disenfranchised children need to help them develop the resiliency they must have to navigate a system that is not designed for them (Garza, 2004).

The attention and focus on the state and federal accountability measures trickles down to the students and the teachers in the form of severe consequences for students and pressure on teachers to meet the standards. The data clearly manifest the theme of effects of standardized testing. For the purpose of analysis, this theme is organized using the following subthemes: (a) pressure and stress, (b) subtractive curriculum, and (c) sustaining TAKS scores.

Standardized testing is a gate-keeping measure. Sacks (1999) referred to this as the hegemony of testing because its main purpose is to sort large numbers of students in as efficient a manner as possible. The results are often used for tracking and stratification purposes.

Valenzuela's (1999) notion of subtractive schooling is the best-suited lens for analysis. Standardized testing endorses an insensitive approach to the needs of minority children that cannot be analyzed through the CRT analytical filter.

Focus on Assessment

The principal at Fordham Elementary believes that the school's success on the standardized state exam can be attributed to the high standards that are set for the students. High standards were defined by the principal as "a no-nonsense classroom, pushing students, competitiveness, and a belief in testing." Fordham Elementary is driven by high-stakes standardized test data. This was evident and observed even in

kindergarten classrooms. “We’ve looked at the kinder ITBS scores so we know what we have to build onto. Phonemic awareness is real low this year, usually it’s not . . . We’ve already started working on that because that’s a difficult one.”

One of the first activities of this school year for all staff was a retreat. The teachers came together to review and analyze the TAKS data of the previous year. The principal and her administrative team put the staff through a comprehensive data disaggregation process to determine the areas of strength and concern. This year a testing coordinator was hired to focus on the TAKS objectives and to support and assist with teaching strategies. Though the teachers expressed concern about the emphasis on testing, they were willing to do “whatever it takes” to ensure that students passed the TAKS. Based on my observations and interaction with the participants, “whatever it takes” meant focusing all their efforts, planning, and instruction on the mastery of the TAKS.

At Fordham Elementary teachers are required to assess TAKS objectives daily. They formulate TAKS practice questions and TAKS “warm ups” and then meet with their grade level everyday. The teachers share and discuss the objectives the students failed on the practice tests. The daily assessments are then turned in to the instructional specialist and the principal. The instructional specialist reviews assessments with the principal and then meets with the teachers as a grade-level group and individually to discuss strategies for remediation. This is an ongoing process; they

do it day in and day out and week in and week out until the exams are administered in the spring.

The limited and narrow focus on standardized tests such as TAKS results in a low-level test design composed of short-answer, multiple-choice questions that ignore active skills such as writing, speaking, acting, drawing, and constructing (Bowers, as quoted in Sacks, 1999, p. 9). I found little or no evidence that students at Fordham Elementary were involved in activities that required critical thinking, analysis, and synthesis beyond the scope of the TAKS. The focus on TAKS left little time to do anything else, according to Kim. She shared her frustration.

> Then we have 20 minutes of breakfast in the morning that cuts into our instructional time every day. Every day we lose 20 minutes of teaching time. If I am short on time . . . I pick out the things that I need to have before I get to TAKS and pick up stuff I know is going to be on the test that has to be taught now.

Stress and Pressure

I felt and observed tension throughout the school building and classrooms. Teachers felt pressure from their administrators, and the students felt pressure from their teachers; there was no time to waste and no time to enjoy learning to learn.

A general consensus among the teachers was a widespread tendency to teach to the test. Miriam expressed some frustration that the campus was totally data driven. As a first-grade teacher she was concerned that the TAKS was the only source

of data used to evaluate students and teachers. “It really is very stressful for the kids, especially in the upper grades. It [TAKS] is just a measurement; it should not be used to force or pressure the students. It shouldn’t be used to pass or fail.”

Velma described the focus on testing as stressful for students and teachers. “So much is riding on the TAKS, and the students could wake up on an off day and not perform well. TAKS scores don’t show how hard teachers and students work.” The pressure of the TAKS has literally made her sick at times.

> I hate the physical illness from [TAKS] that sometimes I feel if I get a bad vibe on my students, and I don’t think the day is going well. I get physically ill because I get so intensely into it. It’s a big rush for me. I want them to do really well because I know how hard we work. It’s good and it’s bad.

The emotional and intellectual abuse caused by standardized testing was prevalent and manifested in many ways in every classroom that I observed. Teachers were stressed and short tempered and admitted getting physically ill. Students seemed subdued and compliant, as if they were only going through the motions.

The effects of high-stakes testing have taken its toll on the teachers at Fordham Elementary. Even though they have made significant gains from year to year to maintain their recognized status, they know the pressure will continue to grow.

> She [principal] is looking for results and scores and she wants to be on top. . . . And being a Recognized [school] for so many years, the pressure gets worse. The passing rate gets higher. We can’t just make a year’s progress; we have to make a year and some to stay at the level.

Subtractive Curriculum

Teachers and administrators are compelled to enforce the state and federal accountability policies and guidelines. Thus, it is important for children to demonstrate mastery of state assessments. However, a narrow focus on testing can be counterproductive if the TAKS becomes the principal and only curriculum. If this occurs, there is a risk that children may never be exposed to the more rigorous and challenging curriculum. It is less likely also that they ever will be immersed in an instructional program that is pedagogically culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

One of participants expressed that high-stakes testing has had a "subtractive" effect on children academically and socially. Academically, she said, "It's boxed it in, and it's taken away creativity, and you've got to target, and you've only got so many days to get there. Here basically it's the basics. We're just trying to stay above water." She was concerned that she did not have time to focus on the social development of her students. "I've always wanted my children to grow up to be good human beings and good citizens, and regardless of what test they take, I stress that and I've always stressed that."

Miriam expressed concern that supports the negative effects of high-stakes testing on minority children. She believes that she spends most of her time preparing her students for the TAKS and not enough time on real-world experiences that are not measured by the exam. She shared the following comparison to make her point.

> I think our time is spent so much on getting their scores where they need to be; like, for example, I have a friend that teaches in Riverside, they took the first test, the first practice test, and she had 85% passing already. So she doesn't have to spend very much time. She can be creative and accelerate. We have some here that are at 30% or 20% passing at the beginning, so we've got a lot of work to do, a lot of after schools, a lot of Saturdays.

The focus on testing hurts minority children not because they are less capable, but because teachers narrow their own focus about teaching and learning. There is absolutely no reason why teachers have to wait for their students to show mastery on the TAKS to "be more creative and accelerate." I contend that students will do better when they are exposed to more creative, rigorous, challenging, and culturally relevant pedagogical instruction. Unless teachers transform their views about the abilities of Mexican American students to learn, they will continue to be locked in the vicious cycle of remediation. This cycle of remediation perpetuates a system social reproduction that helps maintain the hegemonic culture.

Sustaining TAKS Scores

Teachers at Fordham Elementary unanimously reported that when their students leave their school they are successful and prepared. A review of the AEIS data (TEA, 2004) reflected that TAKS passing rates decline in middle and high school. The data also indicated that high school completion rates continue to be dismally low. It can be assumed that using the standardized test as an indicator or predictor of success is problematic. The participants seemed frustrated and resentful that the

teachers in the secondary grades were not maintaining the high passing TAKS rates. They placed the blame on the teachers. One participant offered her explanation.

> I really believe it's the middle school and the high school teachers' fault. I don't think they have any standards for the kids or any expectations. When we send these kids to them, we send good products. . . . I don't know what they do with it.

The teachers were aware that many of the students they sent to the middle school do not do well. They also know that they struggle in high school. What they failed to acknowledge is that the passing rates begin to decrease while still in elementary. Based on their 2003–2004 AEIS report (TEA, 2004), the percentage of third-grade students (86%) was significantly higher than that for fourth (73%) and fifth graders (55%). Granted, these are different student cohorts, but the data show a consistent pattern of decreasing passing rates from grade to grade and from elementary to middle and high school.

Summary

This theme addressed a topic of national concern. High-stakes testing impacts the lives of students and educators daily. The teachers are on the front lines of this debate, and the students are the only ones who suffer the severe consequences of the accountability system mandated by state and federal policymakers. Teachers and principals could lose the jobs, but the law does not require their termination. However, the law is clear about students who do not pass the third grade reading

TAKS in Texas: They are retained. The law is clear about high school students that do not pass the exit exam: They do not graduate.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, INTERPRETATION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

In this final chapter to bring closure to this dissertation, I provide a brief summary of the research project and a summary of the findings. Following the summary, I use Ladson-Billings' (1994) notion of CRT and Valenzuela's (1999) notion of subtractive schooling as a conceptual framework to provide a more holistic analysis. I provide a review of the themes presented in chapter 5; the themes are overlapping and spiraling. After the interpretation of the findings, I offer several implications for practice, policy, and future research. The last two sections of this chapter present the limitations and conclusions.

Summary of the Research and Findings

The literature on culturally relevant teaching has made significant contributions to the field of education in many ways. The most important has been the focus and attention it has brought to the academic success of minority children and the beliefs and practices of the teachers who have helped them achieve it (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Theories and research about culturally relevant teaching have expanded our knowledge about what comprises pedagogical success and how it may be achieved. The educational statistics for low-SES, Mexican American students

reveal disproportionate levels of academic underachievement in comparison with their Anglo counterparts (Cummins, 1989, 1997; Valencia, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999).

This was an exploratory study of four "successful" White, female teachers of Mexican American students. The divergent cultures of the participants and their students were a primary interest of study. The varying level of cultural congruence or divergence between the teachers and the students was an important variable. One overarching research question guided this study: What are the specific attributes that, in spite of cultural differences, allow White, female teachers to be effective in providing successful school experiences to low-SES, Mexican American children?

The participants were purposively selected to represent the following criteria: (a) White, (b) female, and (c) teachers of Mexican American children. The site selection was purposive as well; I selected a school district with a majority of Mexican American students and a significant percentage of White teaching staff. The assistant superintendent selected and assigned to me a campus of study that met the student and teacher criteria. The demographics of the campus met the criteria: 98% Hispanic students, 98% low-SES students, 21% limited English proficient students, and 41% White teachers.

The campus of study, Fordham Elementary, has achieved either Exemplary or Recognized status during the past several years according the state accountability rating system. The AEIS report (TEA, 2004) indicated that Fordham Elementary

achieved a rating of Recognized status in 2004. To achieve a Recognized rating, an average of 80% of all students and subgroups must pass each of the tests (Reading, Math, Writing, and Science). The TAKS scores for 2003–2004 were as follows: third-grade Reading, 92%; Math, 88 %; and all tests taken, 86%; fourth-grade Reading, 83%; Math, 75%; and all tests taken, 73%; and fifth-grade Reading, 74%; Math, 84%; and all tests taken, 55%. Based on TAKS scores, the majority of the students at Fordham Elementary can be considered to be academically successful.

The focus of this study was to identify and investigate the attitudes, beliefs, and life experiences of the White, female participants. The principal nominated these teachers because she considered them to be highly effective with their students. According to the principal, the 4 teachers "went above and beyond, had high expectations for students, were traditional and no-nonsense, and had positive attitudes." The principal and teachers seemed truly concerned about their students' welfare and believe that they are providing a safe haven for them at school. One teacher expressed her concerns:

> I worry about them so I know they are nice and safe when they are in the school. I know they are going to get all the meals. I know as soon as they reach out to me to get a hug, they've got that hug right back.

Another teacher commented, "I give them tough love kind of parenting angle, and most of the time I think it works well." Miriam said, "For a lot of them [students] this is their safe zone so they don't have to worry." To the principal and teachers,

success was measured and determined by the passing rate of their students on the TAKS. All 4 teachers conveyed a commitment to success. They view the TAKS as a challenge for themselves.

> I like TAKS; it forces us to teach at a higher level and I think kids were getting short-changed in education prior to it . . .it is not so much that, as it is the stamina. It's a big rush for me, I want to do really well because I know how hard we work.

Each of these participants articulated her views in her own different and unique way. The participants manifested distinctive characteristics in their delivery of instruction as well as individual, discrete teaching styles. Their approaches to building relationships with their students were also different. This was evident in their perceptions of their degree of effectiveness and importance of building relationships with their students and their parents.

Why were Velma, Pamela, Kim, and Miriam successful, White teachers of Mexican American students? These White, female teachers of Mexican American students were found to be successful and very adept at influencing and motivating their students to pass the state-mandated standardized tests. The participants shared the following attributes and characteristics: (a) commitment, (b) dedication, (c) persistence, (d) hard work, and (e) resourcefulness.

Commitment

All 4 teachers were committed to ensure that their students did well on TAKS. Their commitment was demonstrated in their strong support for and belief in testing. One teacher thought the test was appropriate. She said, "I think it's a very good test. If they knew everything on TAKS, they would be very smart."

Dedication

Their dedication to the challenge of achieving high passing rates was manifested in a "whatever it takes" attitude. Based on my observations and interaction with the participants, "whatever it takes" meant focusing all their efforts, planning, and instruction on the mastery of the TAKS. Everyday lessons were designed and implemented around the TAKS objectives. Teachers, campus administrators, and campus specialists reviewed and analyzed grade-level practice tests to isolate objectives and specific questions that were not mastered by the students. They used the data to plan lessons designed to reteach the identified problem objectives.

Persistence

The persistence of these successful teachers was indisputable. Teachers spent hours before and after school providing tutorials for all students. They required

Saturday school and even picked up the students who did not have transportation. One of the teachers was commended by her principal for being a "strict disciplinarian." The principal went on to say, "She pushes them to high levels, often making more than a year's growth within the year."

Hard Work

It was undeniable that these 4 teachers worked hard. They agreed that to be a teacher at Fordham Elementary required hard work. They also concurred that teaching "these" students was harder than teaching students from White, middle-class schools. As one teacher shared, "I work really hard. I'm always on them. I never give up on them. I ride them until they can't do it anymore."

Resourceful

The 4 teachers were resourceful in the sense that they were always looking for ways to get the most from and for their students. They planned with their grade-level team, and they worked with the music and PE teachers to integrate the TAKS objectives to make sure that everyone was focused on TAKS. All the teachers met with the instructional specialist to adapt lessons and learn new TAKS strategies.

These attributes were the most apparent among the participants. These were the attributes that helped to define them as successful teachers of Mexican American

students. The definition of success was reciprocal. The teachers were successful because their students were able to perform well on TAKS, and the students were successful because the teachers refused to let them fail the test. The state accountability system, with its rating system, determines who is successful in the public's eye based a single measure know as the TAKS test in Texas.

Interpretation

For the purpose of analysis and interpretation, I used Ladson-Billings' (1994) notion of CRT and Valenzuela's (1999) notion of subtractive schooling. These two perspectives served as analytical filters; data were filtered through one of these perspectives, but not both. The data seemed to bounce back and forth between the two perspectives; sometimes it could be interpreted through the CRT filter and other times through the subtractive schooling lens. The Ladson-Billings model indicated that minority students perform better and have more rewarding school experiences when they are in a school environment that is sensitive to their culture. A persistent theme in the literature was consistent with Ladson-Billings' CRT. On the other hand, the second pattern that emerged in the literature review showed that minority students tend to be less successful in schools that do not acknowledge their lifestyle or respect their culture. Furthermore, the literature suggests that the underachievement of minority children is related to the cultural incongruity between teachers from

mainstream cultural backgrounds and their students. This type of literature resonates with Valenzuela's notion of subtractive schooling.

When I began to analyze the data I relied on Ladson-Billings' (1994) notion of CRT for interpretation. It was only logical, I thought, to use the CRT lens if the participants under study were successful, White teachers of Mexican American students. The teachers were "successful" because they had high passing TAKS rates. However, I found little or no evidence of CRT, and it was impossible to use CRT alone as an interpretive tool. It became apparent that the process of assimilation was pervasive in all the teachers' practices; "subtractive schooling" was the preferred approach. As an alternative lens, I turned to Valenzuela's (1999) notion of subtractive schooling. Teachers paid little or no attention to culturally relevant pedagogy. Teaching their students "citizenship" was the disguise for assimilation. Their primary goal was for their students to become "good and productive citizens." Elementary students are at the beginning of the subtractive schooling process; they tend to conform and show initial evidence of success. They offer little or no resistance at this young age. The participants all expressed the belief that their students are performing well when they leave elementary, but their principal measure of success is student TAKS scores. They all expressed their frustration about their students' lack of continued success at the middle and high school. The longer the students stay in

school, and the older they get, the more evidence of the effects of subtractive schooling.

Lack of Culturally Relevant Teaching

A secondary phenomenon emerged from the data that was initially difficult to understand. I found little or no evidence of CRT in any of these teachers' classrooms. The children were immersed in a pervasive environment of assimilation in their individual classrooms and everywhere else on campus. Although none of these teachers practice CRT, their students are deemed successful according to the state accountability standards. This phenomenon seems to debunk both the notion of CRT and the notion of subtractive schooling.

On the surface, the subtractive pedagogy implemented by these teachers appears to be effective. At a deeper level, this perception may not be so convincing. It is difficult to detect the effects of subtractive schooling at an early age in the educational process. Elementary children are still compliant, conforming, and obedient; the teachers are still able to encourage and motivate as well cajole, push, and intimidate them into compliance. Children at this age are less likely to be openly defiant or resistant to the hegemonic culture of the school system. The deficit-thinking paradigm was insidious as was the process of subtractive schooling at Fordham Elementary.

High Short-Term Expectations, Low Long-Term Expectations

Although the effects of subtractive schooling were not manifested at the elementary level, its effects gradually surfaced as the students moved from grade to grade and from middle school to high school. The participants set high and low expectations for their students. Their high expectations were short term; while they had students in their classrooms they expected all students to master the TAKS. They took this challenge very seriously, as expressed by one of the participants:

> I'm going to find a way to make whatever subject it is, language arts or social studies, benefit my students in TAKS by making sure that the way that I'm instructing them in that subject is going to be something that they can incorporate into their TAKS skills. TAKS keeps me more focused.

Teachers were totally consumed by this challenge; they wanted the highest passing rates in the district. To these participants, passing the TAKS was a high expectation for their students. However, the competition for the highest passing rates was the driving force for the high expectations they set for themselves, not the students. At Fordham Elementary the effects of short-term high expectations were evident. The teachers and the students were relatively successful as measured by the TAKS; teachers had high passing rates and most students passed.

However, their long-term expectations were disturbingly low. Their expectations of their students beyond high school were dismally low. Three of the 4 teachers stated, "Not all students are college material," and the 4th said, "Not everyone

is going to college." They believed that not all students were "college material and that there is a place for these students in our society." Their place in society was in the workforce; they could be productive and successful working in grocery stores, hotels, and fast-food restaurants.

> Not everybody is going to be a rocket scientist, and not everybody is going to go to college, much to President Bush's idea. Somebody has to work at HEB. Somebody has to work at McDonalds. Somebody has to work at Dairy Queen, you know. We have to have those people. We can't survive without those people. We need people to work in the hotels. And there's nothing wrong with those jobs. . . . We need people to clean schools, we need those people. We can't survive without them. We just have to come to the realization that all these kids do not learn at the same level, do not have the same capabilities that everybody else does.

The teachers defined the successful student as one who is resilient, persistent, determined, and college bound. Their definition was in conflict with their expectations of their students. They did not expect many of their students to attend college. They rationalized that working in minimum-wage service jobs was an indication of success as long they "tried their best."

Staying consistent with the definition of success and using the same source of evidence (TAKS) to determine the successful teacher and student, a pattern of declining success was evident in middle school and high school. The participants were frustrated and resentful that the teachers in the secondary grades failed to maintain the high passing TAKS rates. One participant offered her explanation:

> I really believe it's the middle school and the high school teachers' fault. I don't think they have any standards for the kids or any expectations. When

> we send these kids to them, we send good products. . . . I don't know what they do with it.

The teachers knew that many of their students struggled in middle school and high school, but they were not aware that the passing rates began to decline while the students were still at the elementary. Based on their 2003–2004 AEIS report (TEA, 2004), the percentage of third-grade students that passed all the tests was 86%, significantly higher than that for fourth graders (73%) and fifth graders (55%). The data also reflected that TAKS passing rates declined consistently in middle and high school. The percentages of students passing all tests were as follows: Grade 6, 55%; Grade 7, 52%; Grade 8, 55%; Grade 9, 42%; and Grade 10, 29%. In addition, high school completion rates were significantly lower than the state average for the 2002 class. The school district's completion rate was 69% compared to 83% for the state. The dropout rate for the district was 10.5%, twice as high as the state average of 5%.

If TAKS is an indicator of success, it is also an indicator of failure. The effects of subtractive schooling may not be immediately evident in the early years of a child's education, but they emerge in the form of significantly lower TAKS passing rates in high school and high dropout rates.

Four common themes emerged from the data. These were (a) teachers' perceptions of culture, (b) teachers' perceptions of parents and their role, (c) expectations and success, and (d) effects of standardized testing.

Teachers' Perceptions of Culture

Culture emerged as the most prevalent theme across all the data. This study would be very limited if the teachers were not engaged in discourse about culture. The interaction between the teachers' and students' cultures was dynamic; it was an ongoing process of negotiation. It is fair to say that all 4 participants consciously attempted to be sensitive and respectful of their students' culture; in turn, the students conformed to the teachers' expectations without much or any resistance. Nonetheless, unconsciously or not, the teachers constantly imposed their own values and beliefs on their students and parents. This was in total opposition to CRT. The teachers persistently exhibited practices more similarly aligned to subtractive schooling. There was little doubt that the teachers were properly identified as successful teachers, but their approach was not congruent with the premises of CRT. They were considered successful; they were well-intentioned teachers who were very effective in getting their students to pass the TAKS.

Teachers' Perceptions of Parents and Their Role

The parent's role was a prevailing theme as well. The participants reported that the parent's role is very important. The 4 participants wanted parents to be more actively involved in the education of the children, but they did not display a willingness to try more creative, less traditional strategies to encourage such

involvement. They interpreted the parents' absence as an indication of lack of caring. The participants interpreted parental involvement using the hegemonic culture as a template. They wanted the Mexican American parents to demonstrate that they care about their children's education the same way the White parents do. This expectation is not only subtractive for the children, but subtractive for the parents as well. Their genuine hope for meaningful parental involvement appeared ambiguous. They compared the radically different forms of parental involvement in the more affluent, White school districts with the perceived low or nonexistent parental support in their own school. This type of comparison is problematic because it results in an unfair "either–or" interpretation of the participants' beliefs about parental involvement. This unfair interpretation takes the form of ambiguity and contradiction. This inconsistency gives the impression that the teachers do not want one or the other. That is not the case with these participants. They absolutely know they want and need the parents to be more involved, but they seemed to be struggling to find the middle ground between the two extremes.

Expectations and Success

For the theme of expectations and success, assimilation was the underlying premise. One of the most obvious signs of assimilation is the loss of one's native language. In Texas, the early-exit model of bilingual education is the most common

type. Children are expected to transition to English as early as possible. At Fordham Elementary some children are tested in Spanish in the third and fourth grades, but no children took the TAKS test in Spanish in the fifth grade in 2003–2004 (TEA, 2004). Language is perhaps the most personal aspect of culture, and its eradication is a prime example of subtractive schooling (Cummins, 1989; Valenzuela, 1999). The participants were totally committed to teaching their students to be model citizens, as if the students came to school devoid of any morals or principles. Most of the values of a "good" human being are common across all cultures; students learn them at home from their parents and family. This theme illustrates the teachers' overt and subtle efforts to assimilate their students by making a conscious decision to teach them how to be "good citizens." This was done in the form of teaching their students to be patriotic and loyal to their country.

The assimilation process starts early in schools. In the process of assimilation minority students are at risk of losing touch with their culture if teachers ignore the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy. The participants assumed total responsibility to teach the values and beliefs characteristic of a model citizen, as if the students did not learn morals or principles at home. Perhaps the teachers' main responsibility should be to support, enhance, and use the knowledge the children already possess, as suggested by Ladson-Billings (1994) and Valenzuela (1999).

Effects of Standardized Testing

The effects of standardized testing were the culminating theme because the success or failure of students at Fordham Elementary is primarily measured by their degree of performance on the TAKS standardized exam. This is true for the teachers as well. The participants were nominated for this study by their principal because of their high expectations, traditional, no nonsense approach, and positive attitudes. These characteristics were defined in the context of teaching to the standardized test objectives and translated to high passing rates on the TAKS. Valenzuela's (1999) notion of subtractive schooling was the best-suited lens for analysis for this theme. Standardized testing endorses an insensitive approach to the needs of minority children that cannot be analyzed through the CRT analytical filter. Recent federal and state mandates have raised accountability standards with severe sanctions for students and schools if they fail to meet them.

The current movement to hold schools accountable has relied on the use of standardized testing as the principal instrument to measure the success of failure of the students and the school systems. Across the nation's schools, there seems to be a general acceptance of the persistent efforts of policymakers to reproduce an educational system that leads to rote, superficial, standardized thinking and intellectual abuse. This type of system perpetuates the stratification of the hegemonic sequence of testing and the constant low-level cycle of remediation (Sacks, 1999).

High-stakes standardized testing promotes and encourages the deficit-thinking practice of "teaching the basics." Unfortunately, most often minority children continue to be trapped in this perpetuating cycle of exclusion. This creates another gap referred to as the "invisible" gap. This is the exclusive knowledge and experiences disenfranchised children need to help them develop the resiliency they must have to navigate a system that is not designed for them (Garza, 2004). The attention and focus on the state and federal accountability measures trickle down to the students and the teachers in the form of severe consequences for students and pressure on teachers to meet the standards.

As the literature suggests, deficit thinking has several implications for teachers and students (Cummins, 1989; Ryan, 1971; Valencia, 1991). The teachers in this study accepted the paradigm of deficit thinking and used the students' lifestyle, which they described as "lack of experiences," as a justification to begin the subtractive schooling process as defined by Valenzuela (1999). They persistently expressed throughout our interviews that children at Fordham Elementary are innately less competent, less intelligent, less capable, and less motivated than the children of the middle-class dominant culture. Teachers in this study accepted this deficit paradigm and never suggested a need to question their pedagogy, teaching practices, methodologies, or their beliefs. Therefore, since these teachers never identified their perceptions and beliefs or the school system as a problem, they had no thoughts for

solutions or improvements. Change was not mentioned or seen as within the teacher's realm of influence. The 4 participants in this project did not explore the concept of social justice or question their beliefs and practices. They expressed that the students needed to change their lifestyles in order to succeed. The teachers blamed the parents, families, and community for the disconnect between the school and home. They suggested that the students would be able to overcome the obstacles, if the students "worked harder . . . All they need to do is put forth the effort. They are reasonably intelligent children, you know." Teachers defined success as working in the service industries, such as grocery stores and fast-food restaurants, and joining the military. Teachers often talked about the need to teach their students how to be productive citizens. If students are to become good citizens, they must learn "respect for their country."

These educators' deficit thinking had detrimental consequences for students (Cummins, 1989; Valencia, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999). The teachers' perceptions of the students as needy, lacking, and behind perpetuated low expectations, which in turn validated the implementation of a low-level curriculum and maintained a cycle of remediation. Culturally relevant pedagogy was not identified. Culturally relevant teachers care not only professionally, but also personally about their students. They share and understand the culture of their students and interweave the students' culture and language into the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

As Bourdieu (1982) posited, teachers are the products of a system whose plan is to transmit the hegemonic culture. The teachers in this study have adopted the values of the larger power structure. This is the very system to which the teachers owe their success, and they cannot avoid bringing into play these values when teaching and assessing their students. The teachers accepted the coercive power structure and never challenged it.

Their dysconsciousness was evident when they allowed themselves to perpetuate the status quo through an assimilationist approach. Unfortunately, the students in these classrooms are subjected to a process of social reproduction that can be understood better through Valenzuela's (1999) notion of subtractive schooling. Bourdieu (1982) also proposed that education is not the great equalizer, but a maintenance strategy in social reproduction. He asserted that education reproduces rather than redistributes capital culture.

Teachers in this study stated that they were teaching at Fordham because it was a calling from God, a place they were needed or could make a difference. Teachers declared their love for "these kinds of kids." Therefore, they were on a mission to help "these" children succeed by educating them away from their families. The participants also used assumptions of poverty to explain the underachievement of their Mexican American students. Never was the issue of social justice or racism brought to the forefront. I guided the conversation towards the issues of culture and

race, but the teachers avoided the topics and wanted to find other explanations for the underachievement of their students. The 4 White teachers that participated in this study used theories such as poverty to explain the underachievement of students of color to minimize the issue of race in education. Explaining poverty in this framework exempts society, institutions such as schools, and teachers from any responsibility.

Implications for Policy, Practice and Further Research

Demographic patterns indicate that the number of Mexican American students is increasing at a faster pace than projected. In contrast, the number of White teachers is also on the rise across the United States. Hence, given this pattern, an increasing number of Mexican American children will be taught by White teachers. There is a lack of understanding about White teachers who are effective with minority students, particularly those children who have been labeled negatively by the school system. In light of this trend of student and teacher representation, there is a need to expand and build on the research about successful teachers of minority children. Limited research has examined the development and significance of White, female teachers' beliefs and perceptions of their students of color. Several studies have focused specifically on "successful" teachers (Beauboeuf, 1997; Chamberlain, 1999; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003), but few have looked specifically at successful, White teachers of Mexican American students.

Implications for Policy

An implication for policy might be that policymakers collectively and collaboratively identify the knowledge and skills necessary for educators to lead from a strong social justice perspective. Universities should take an aggressive role to give preservice teachers meaningful experiences and the opportunity to practice and reflect on what they experience in a diverse classroom. This would require that teachers be provided a platform to question their assumptions about low-SES children of color in order to understand how their beliefs affect their teaching. Teachers must explore what the concepts of culture, poverty, and language mean to them in relation to how their philosophies impact the children in their classroom. Methods for examining their perceptions about students and beliefs about teaching need to be available. In addition, teachers should be prepared and supported to challenge the status quo of school culture if it is in the best interest of their students. Educators should also question assimilationist ideologies and build on the cultural, linguistic, and community knowledge that students bring with them to school.

Furthermore, attributes of White teachers who have proven to be successful with students of color need to be researched, discussed, and modeled in teacher preparation programs. Successful teachers may be identified as those that assist students in negotiating and navigating through the system as well as those who

provide support and help students build resiliency to work in the system and maintain their cultural identity and dignity (Garza, 1998; Scheurich, 1998, 2002; Valdéz, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999).

In contrast, those teachers who support adapting or assimilating into the system may be diminishing the very qualities that make these students successful. In other words, adapting implies that one can become part of the system. However, that is philosophically impossible, because the hegemonic culture of the school system excludes students based on culture, color, and language; students remain marginalized no matter how much they adapt.

Implications for Practice

Teacher preparation programs focus on methods and theories of teaching and learning and prepare prospective teachers to utilize best practices and strategies. However, teacher preparation programs do little to prepare preservice teachers for the stress and pressure of standardized testing that they will encounter when they begin their careers. New teachers quickly realize that best teaching practices are not easy to apply in a curriculum driven by standardized testing. Many fall into the trap of remediation in their efforts to prepare their students to pass the TAKS. Thus, universities face a dilemma. Teacher preparation programs need to reconcile the realities of high-stakes testing with best practices that include creative, rigorous,

challenging, and culturally relevant pedagogical instruction. Further research is necessary to address this dilemma.

Another implication is related to the increasing number of White teachers and Mexican American students. This demographic pattern amplifies the cultural gap. If White preservice teachers are not prepared to deal with diversity, they will fall back on their own experiences and impose their own culture on their students. Preparation programs should focus on culturally relevant pedagogical practices for future teachers.

Implications for further research

Additionally, further research is needed about how successful Mexican American students have managed to navigate and succeed in the public school system. As noted, there is little research in the area of successful teachers of Mexican American students; replication of this study would add to the literature. I had the opportunity to meet with a few Mexican American teachers while on the campus. The perceptions and beliefs of the Mexican American teachers were in opposition to the beliefs and perceptions of their White, female teacher colleagues. Each of the Mexican American teachers also displayed an emotional factor during our conversations. Therefore, another study that focuses on successful Mexican American teachers of Mexican American students would provide a different perspective to this research.

It is also important to consider the role of the principal. Principals play an important role in determining the school climate and teacher attitudes towards students. It would be valuable to discover the attributes of successful, White principals of schools that are predominantly populated by Mexican American students.

Limitations

Several limitations are evident with this study. The most obvious limitation was the similarity of my experiences with those of the participants. Most of my work (20 years) as a teacher, administrator, and principal has been with Mexican American students. My deep passion for this type of inquiry is the result of my lived experiences as a public school student, teacher, and principal. As a young student I was on the receiving end of a system that stratified and bestowed upon me the low expectations of a deficit-thinking society. It is difficult to assume absolute objectivity because my personal biases may have influenced the process of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data. However, once the researcher is conscious of possible deficiencies, he/she can take precautions to avoid them (Patton, 1990). Nonetheless, though my experiences may have prejudiced my perspective, they also served as a heuristic tool to see beyond what was not shared or observed. The participants thought I was one of them because I looked like one of them. They opened up quickly

and shared willingly their feeling about the students, their families, and their deficits. My heuristic knowledge gained from years of watching and observing how Mexican American students were relegated and literally pushed to the back of the classroom served as a tool to hear what was not said, see what was not to be observed, and feel what was not meant for me.

Another possible limitation is the perceived lack of generality of qualitative research. This was an exploratory study; it was an interpretation of specific phenomena within a unique setting (Merriam, 1988). Making generalizations would be problematic, but generalization is not the intent or purpose of qualitative research or my study. I wanted to know the experiences, feelings, and thoughts of these White women who were deemed successful teachers of Mexican American students. Therefore, the findings of this exploratory study apply to these particular teachers and are not generalizable.

Time constraints were also a limitation in terms of setting up the research schedule. It was difficult and time intensive to coordinate interviews and observations such that the schedules did not interrupt the instructional time of the participants and the students.

Conclusion

The research shows a pervasive problem in successfully schooling Mexican American students. The educational statistics for low-SES, Mexican American students reveal disproportionate academic underachievement in comparison with their Anglo counterparts (Cummins, 1989, 1997; Valencia, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999). Many educators continue to look outside the system and themselves, blaming the students and their families.

In this study I examined the beliefs and perceptions of successful, White, female teachers. This inquiry was designed to bring forth the attributes and experiences of White, female teachers who, in spite of their cultural mismatch, have been identified as successful teachers of Mexican American children. I wanted to examine how these beliefs and experiences helped design and drive their pedagogy.

There is a continued and increasing demographic and cultural mismatch between students and teachers in both public schools and institutions of higher learning. Numerous studies have demonstrated that deficit-thinking paradigms are highly pervasive in both these institutions and consequently perpetuate the value system as the norm. Statistics also show increasing ethnic, cultural, and language mismatches between students and teachers in public schools, colleges, and universities (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996; National Education Association, 2002).

The 4 White, female teachers in this study failed to acknowledge, recognize, and honor the students' diverse beliefs, perceptions, and realities. Hence, they were not able effectively to dignify and respect their students' existence as individuals. Contrary to CRT attributes, these teachers consistently displayed assimilationist teaching strategies and behaviors. The teachers all participated in subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999).

The teachers in this study were considered successful based on the number of students who passed the standardized test. Metaphorically, the state accountability system is a large assimilation umbrella. The teachers use it to cover as many students as possible. As the children get older and bigger, fewer children fit under it. This metaphor is analogous to the short-term "success" at the elementary level and the long-term effects of subtractive schooling. The participants were relentless in their efforts to incorporate them into a society of "good citizens." The sooner the students learned to operate in the "White way of knowing," the sooner the students as well as the teachers were deemed successful.

The challenge for us as educators is ever-present; we must continue to renew our commitment. We must find ways to honor, dignify and incorporate the knowledge of Mexican American children, families and their communities into our classrooms. There will be much to gain by using the strengths of Mexican American children to strengthen ourselves personally and professionally.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

Rebecca Garza
P.O. Box 1336
Progreso, Texas 78579
[cell phone number]

Dear Woodburn I.S.D. Principals:

I am conducting research to fulfill the dissertation requirement for Ph.D. at The University of Texas at Austin. The purpose of my study is to explore highly successful White, female teachers of low-SES Mexican American students. The educational statistics for low-SES, Mexican American students reveal disproportionate academic underachievement in comparison with their Anglo counterparts Researchers suggest that a contributing factor may be the cultural incongruity between teachers and their students (close to 90% of teachers are White). Learning about the perspectives of successful White teachers in regards to their students may be beneficial to both educators and teacher preparation programs.

In order to conduct this study I need your assistance in identifying teachers who fit the following criteria. These teachers must:

- be female
- identify themselves as White, Anglo, or Caucasian.
- currently teach students in Grades K–5.
- teach a majority of Mexican American students.
- have at least 3 years' teaching experience.
- be identified as highly successful in teaching Mexican American students.

I would also ask that I be able to schedule interviews with you to discuss the criteria of successful and what you believe makes the nominated White teacher highly successful with her Mexican American students. I also will want to interview colleagues of the identified teachers. I will follow district and campus protocol and only speak to teachers and colleagues who agree to participate. These interviews and observations will be with your approval of schedules days and times.

If you have any questions about the nomination procedures and interviews please do not hesitate to call me at [phone number] or my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Jim Scheurich at [phone number].

Please fill out the nomination form and personal information sheet and mail them in the postage-paid envelope.

Thank you in advance for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Garza

APPENDIX B

TEACHER NOMINATION FORM

Teacher Nomination Form

Teachers Name_____

Teacher's Current
School_____

Please mark the current teaching assignment for this teacher:

Grade_____ Number of years teaching_____ Number of years you have worked with this teacher_____

Please explain why you view this teacher as highly successful in teaching Mexican-American students.

Please describe how you came to believe this teacher is highly successful in teaching Mexican American students.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL GUIDE

Interview Protocol/Guide and Probes

Initial Interview

- Do I have permission to tape the interviews?
- Demographic Data
    - Experience-number of years teaching Mexican American students
    - Certification and degrees what and where?
    - Student demographics-race and SES

Why do you think you are successful teaching Mexican American Students?

What do you do to make sure the needs of your students are met?

What does culture mean to you?

In your experience how does culture affect the teaching and learning process?

What kind of support do the students get from home?

How important are the everyday interpersonal interactions you have with your students? Can you think of an example?

Interview II

- Tell me about your own cultural background.
- Give me some examples of cultural differences.

- Can you describe cultural differences between yourself and your students?
- Think about one of your Mexican American students who is doing particularly well in your class. Give me a profile of that student. Describe the student, but do not name or reveal any information that would identify this student.
- What do you believe are biggest needs of your students, both academically and personally?
- What is your philosophy of teaching?
- In the role of a teacher what are the 3 most important things you can teach your students?
- How do you understand the problem of Mexican American student's underachievement?
- Think about the educational experiences of Mexican American students in U.S. schools. Do you see any differences in Anglo students' educational experiences?

Interview III

- What are the positive and difficult interactions that you have had with parents?
- What do you see as the role of the school in the student's achievement?
- How do you assess your students beyond TAKS?
- What are your beliefs about excellence?

- Do you have any similarities with your students? If so do you point them out to your students?

Interview IV

- Interview IV was used as a venue for follow-up to address participant and researcher questions.
- Member check for triangulation purpose

Observation Protocol

Given the qualitative nature of this research, this guide was used to record observations through use of field notes during and after teacher interviews and observations. I conducted observations for the purpose of connecting teachers' perspectives about their Mexican American students as illustrated in interviews, with what they do in the classroom. Observations were conducted in classrooms, playground, cafeteria, and hallways. The observation helped to triangulate the data as well as assist me to better understand how successful teachers teach their Mexican American students.

Probing Questions

- How do you understand the data that shows the underachievement of the Mexican American students?
- Will you share with me your perception of a caring parent? Describe a parent that cares.
- Describe a successful teacher?
- How do you understand the dropout rate of Mexican American students compared to their Anglo counterparts?

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